

# **Orientation in World Politics: Critical Theory and Long-term Perspectives on Human Development**

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## Abstract

The need for orientation is shared by human beings everywhere. People need to learn about their conditions of existence in order to exercise some degree of control over them as a fundamental requirement for their survival both as individuals and as societies. This thesis is about the challenges that human global interdependence raises to the fulfilment of this task. It argues that the globe-spanning webs of interdependent humankind produce a collective problem of orientation characterised by the requirement for a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition while recognising the difficulty in achieving just that, given how all theorising is necessarily embedded in particular social, cultural and historical contexts. Through a reinterpretation of the works of Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Jürgen Habermas and Norbert Elias the thesis asks how critical international theory might provide a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation. Its main argument is that this answer implies a recovery of grand narratives on the long-term process of human development which avoid a reproduction of the shortcomings with which they have been historically associated; namely, serving as a channel for the projection of parochial and ethnocentric points of view which, under the cover of cosmopolitanism, legitimize practices of exclusion and domination. The conclusion to this thesis is that a synthesis between critical theory and process sociology would enable the production of grand narratives that promote a more cosmopolitan perspective on the conditions of existence of globalised humanity while recognising and protecting the plurality of forms of human self-expression. In this manner, the thesis opens the way towards the development of more adequate means of orientation on the basis of which people might better find their bearings in the world and understand how they might come to make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing.

Strange that in the cold light of the stars, in which even the  
dearest love is frostily assessed, and even the possible  
defeat of our half-waking world is contemplated without  
remission or praise, the human condition does not lose  
but gains significance. Strange, that it seems more,  
not less, urgent to play some part in this struggle,  
this brief effort of animalcules striving to win  
some increase of lucidity before the ultimate darkness.  
(Olaf Stapledon, *Star Maker*)

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Some of the main arguments in this study have been tested before audiences in the United Kingdom in Aberystwyth University, the LSE and Leicester University, and in Portugal in the University of Lisbon. Furthermore, they have also been published, in different form, in *Revista Estudos do Séc.XX*, 13, 2013, pp. 371-387 and *Human Figurations*, 4: 2, 2014.



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## **Introduction**

The need for orientation is a fundamental aspect of human existence. Both individually and collectively, human beings have always depended on their capacity to orientate themselves in the world in order to survive. Individually, to become full adult members of their species, all children need to learn how to control their internal drives and impulses in order to live amongst other human beings in accordance with the standards of their societies. Collectively, human groups need to learn how to exercise some degree of control over non-human nature in order to satisfy their needs, as well as how to regulate intra- and inter-group social relations and conflicts. These learning processes entail the production of symbolically-codified stocks of knowledge which function as means of orientation on the basis of which people find their bearings in the world, understand their societies, how to live in their context, how to relate to outsiders and how to acquire a relative degree of collective control over their conditions of existence which is essential for their continued survival.

This study is about how critical international theory (CIT) might respond to the challenges raised by the need for orientation in the context of a phase of human development characterized by high levels of global interdependence. In it, we argue that with the global interweaving of humanity, CIT's fulfilment of an orientating function, by helping human beings better understand and control their conditions of existence, increasingly depends on its capacity to promote a widening of people's perspectives from more society and time bound points of view to encompass larger human groups – and, ultimately, the species as a whole – in their individual and collective assessments of adequate behaviour and of the consequences of their actions. In this context, we advance the argument that CIT can provide a more adequate answer to the historically emergent need for more cosmopolitan – in the sense of species-encompassing – perspectives by recovering grand narratives on human development.<sup>1</sup> These are understood as very long-term accounts of the process of development and globalisation of the human species, which fulfil an orientating function to the extent that they strive to identify the main social processes shaping human development, on the basis of whose knowledge, human beings

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of grand narratives, and its particular usage in this study, is explained at greater length in Chapter 1, pp. 20-28.

might learn how to attain a greater degree of conscious and collective control over their conditions of existence and thus – to paraphrase Marx – how to make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing.

However, we also argue that any attempt at a recovery of grand narratives in CIT is necessarily coupled with the critical awareness that all theorising and perspective-taking occupies a particular position and point of view in the long chain of human generations. Consequently, a critical recovery of grand narratives must necessarily be attuned to the way in which previous attempts at long-term accounts of human development fell short of the cosmopolitan perspective-taking to which they aspired, and instead frequently reproduced more parochial, society and time bound points of view as if these represented a truly universal perspective; as is the case with modernist 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century grand narratives that framed Western colonial and imperial discourse. Such modernist grand narratives – themselves attempts to answer the human need for orientation – have frequently assumed more the character of modern forms of myth, which serve the particularistic interests of the societies in which they originate, rather than adequate frameworks of orientation. For example, modernist myths originating in Western European societies have tended to identify the historical path of development of the species as a whole with that of the countries of Western Europe, which implies an inherent assessment of all those human groups who do not follow such a path as being somehow deviant, failed or uncivilised. Such an understanding not only ignores the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development but has also served as a legitimisation device for Western European intervention in non-Western contexts, in order to set them on the ‘correct’ historical path, and thus for the legitimisation of particular relations of power, domination, exploitation and exclusion between different sections of humankind.

We thus identify a fundamental tension in CIT’s engagement with the problem of orientation. On the one hand, the search for more cosmopolitan perspectives on the human condition supports an argument in favour of a recovery of grand narratives in critical international theory. On the other hand, CIT’s self-reflexive awareness of the embeddedness of all human perspective-taking in time and space leads it to remain constantly suspicious of grand narratives, and to attempt to expose the underlying parochial points of views that might be hidden and legitimized by their supposed cosmopolitanism.

As we argue throughout this study, this tension in CIT's engagement with the problem of orientation is what makes it particularly suited to carry out a recovery of grand narratives on human development. This recovery seeks to reinforce grand narratives' orientating function by avoiding a reproduction of the shortcomings with which they are usually associated; namely, serving as a channel for the projection of parochial and ethnocentric points of view. We are thus interested in understanding how critical international theory might provide a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation under conditions of global interdependence through the development of theoretical frameworks that, by capturing the predominant social processes shaping the long-term process of human development, constitute more cosmopolitan means of orientation that help human beings better understand themselves, their collective history, and how they might exercise political agency envisioning a greater degree of collective and conscious control over their future development, in a manner that reduces relations of domination, violence and exploitation between people and makes human existence more self-determined, meaningful and enjoyable.

In this context, our study poses two fundamental research questions. First, we inquire about the role of grand narratives in critical international theory's development of more adequate answers to the problem of orientation under conditions of human global interdependence. And second, we ask whether it is possible to recover grand narratives which fulfil an orientating function while guarding against the reproduction of their modernist shortcomings.

In order to answer these questions, we analyse the way in which previous attempts at the production of grand narratives can be understood as engaging with, and answering, the problem of orientation. Specifically, we address the grand narratives of the critical authors Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx and Jürgen Habermas, and of the process sociologist Norbert Elias, in an attempt to understand to what extent – as well as how and why – these fulfil an orientating function by providing a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition, or rather fall into a reproduction of modernist myths. Such an inquiry is instructive for our purposes because it both highlights the potential problems that might be found in an attempted recovery of grand narratives in critical international theory, and provides us with valuable clues regarding how such a recovery might be carried out in a

manner that reinforces the orientating character of grand narratives and avoids their modernist failings.

The choice for these specific authors is justified by the fact that both the critical authors and the process sociologist share amongst themselves a fundamental concern with achieving a species-encompassing perspective on the human condition, which is not locked to a particular time or society, but rather is capable of capturing the whole process of human development both in its past and present trajectories, but also regarding its potential futures. Furthermore, they share the conviction that grand narratives – by contributing to a better understanding of the predominant social processes shaping the conditions of human existence and their long-term historical development – play a fundamental role in helping people acquire a greater degree of conscious control over their future development; even though the manner in which the critical authors conceive of the relation between their grand narratives and political agency is markedly different from that of Elias's process sociology. Consequently, these authors' works are particularly exemplary and instructive to a critical theoretical engagement with the question of how grand narratives might fulfil an orientating function by helping human beings both understand their conditions of globally interwoven existence and how they might collectively come to exercise a greater degree of self-determination over them.

The originality of this study lies in the way in which it engages with the work of these authors through the lenses of the problem of orientation in a manner that both provides a novel reading of their texts and that makes a fundamental contribution to the further development of contemporary critical international theory by identifying how it can fulfil a better orientating function to human beings caught up in global networks of interdependence. Furthermore, this study is also novel in its establishment of synergic links between critical theory and process sociology. This is done in two ways. First, we use Eliasian concepts as a framing device through which we assess the grand narratives of both the critical authors and that of Elias himself. And second, in the last two chapters, we carry out an analysis of how Elias's particular engagement with the long-term study of human development can be instructive for CIT's recovery of grand narratives as a means of orientation.

Our argument is developed throughout seven chapters. In chapter one, we discuss the five main themes informing our study. We connect the problematic of 'orientation' with

the notions of 'grand narratives' and 'cosmopolitanism', as well as with the Eliasian concepts of the 'involvement-detachment balance' and the 'triad of controls', and show how these themes frame the analysis of our chosen authors in the subsequent chapters.

In chapter two, we address Kant's work to reveal the limitations of grand narratives based on philosophical history and on dualisms between the transcendental ascertainment of the ideal conditions of freedom and the analysis of the historical dynamics of human development. These dualisms inherently pose a conception of the long-term history of the species which is both linear and teleological and which betrays a more time bound and Western-centric conception of human development that fails to achieve the cosmopolitan perspective to which Kant aspires.

In chapter three, we discuss Marx's work to argue that it demonstrates how a materialist and emergentist approach to human development can overcome the dualisms that undermine a Kantian answer to the problem of orientation. In particular, we note how Marx's emphasis on the role of human control over nature in the species' history opens the way for a more detached, non-transcendental orientating framework that captures the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development. However, Marx's work also points to the limitations of grand narratives based on the attribution of causal primacy to one dimension of the development of the human powers of control. It shows how these inherently imply a philosophy of the subject which ignores the fundamental condition of plurality of the human species and undermines the potential found in Marx's critical approach for a more adequate means of orientation, substituting it with a linear and teleological approach.

In chapters four and five we consider Habermas's work to argue that it points to the possibility of a reconstruction of Marx's critical approach that overcomes its limitations by recovering Kantian themes such as the role of linguistic communication, the development of social norms, state formation and world politics in the species' history. In particular, we observe how Habermas's writings provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development of the human powers of control in different dimensions of human existence. However, we also argue that Habermas's work once again reveals the limitations of a Kantian-type of transcendental engagement with the problem of orientation and that it recovers the dualisms and linear conception of human history which undermine Kant's critical approach.

In chapter six, we move to discuss Elias's approach to the production of grand narratives as an alternative to that of the critical authors. In this context, and with reference to Elias's notion of the involvement–detachment balance in human knowledge production, we observe that while the critical authors remain fundamentally concerned with understanding the conditions under which political agency might occur that expands human being's capacity to self-determine their conditions of existence, and constantly strive to connect the explanatory side of their grand narratives with this normative goal, Elias is instead focused on providing what he describes as a 'detached' approach to grand narratives. This approach derives from his argument that the development of critical judgements regarding political agency before a more in-depth explanatory understanding is achieved of the predominant social processes shaping human development might lead social scientists' grand narratives to be coloured by their personal and communal more 'involved' and parochial political interests, wishes and fears in a manner that, ultimately, undermines the orientating character of their grand narratives. Consequently, Elias considers that more adequate grand narratives, which avoid the shortcomings of modernist myths, require a predominant focus on their explanatory dimension, i.e. on the identification, explanation and understanding of the social processes shaping human development, rather than on the normative goal of political action envisioning human self-determination. In fact, he defends that successful orientation towards this normative goal by the social sciences depends on the development of more detached and less-politically-coloured grand narratives on the human condition, rather than the other way around.

Our reading of Elias's argument in this context permits us to reinterpret the shortcomings identified in the work of the critical authors in the previous chapters as deriving exactly from their 'over-involvement'. We thus argue that the critical authors' concern with the normative goal of emancipation leads them to constantly combine their explanatory account of the long-term process of human development with their normative identification of the prospects for contemporary political agency envisioning their privileged image of the human future, through grand narratives that see all human development leading up to their particular present and its timely role in the definition of the future of the species. Such an approach again and again makes the critical authors' grand narratives reproduce modernist forms of teleology and linear progressivism which lock them in their particular cultural, spatial and temporal horizons in a manner that effectively blocks their

capacity to capture the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development and legitimizes their own parochial, Western-centric perspectives as representative of a truly cosmopolitan point of view. In this manner, their grand narratives not only fail to achieve the cosmopolitan perspective to which they aspire – since they frame their analysis of the long-term process of human development in the particular concerns of their own societies and time-periods – but they also confirm the Western home-of-thought of these authors as the confluence of the human past, the centre of present historical time and the defining aspect of the species' future in a manner that inherently legitimizes Western predominance over other forms of human self-expression in other sections of humankind.

We then move to demonstrate how Elias's more detached approach to the production of grand narratives can provide a way out of the modernist traps of teleology and linear progressivism in which the critical authors under analysis have fallen. In this context we argue that, in contrast to the critical authors, Elias delays the engagement with the normative implications of his long-term account of human development and their associated questions of political agency. Rather, he strives to capture the predominant social processes shaping human development without inferring what these mean for the prospects of human emancipation or for his personal wishes, fears or political views about the human condition. As a consequence, his approach to grand narratives is not focused on establishing linear and teleological accounts of the process of human development and of how it culminates in the social scientist's present in a manner that informs political action, but rather strives to understand the developmental dynamics of those social processes which, while being universal to all human societies, develop in multi-linear, open-ended and society-specific ways which have become increasingly interweaved at the global level throughout the species' history. In this way, Elias develops a grand narrative on human development that achieves a more cosmopolitan perspective than those of the critical authors to the extent that he is better able to uncouple from his own spatial and temporal horizon and understand human development not in a linear manner, but as the result of the interweaving of several society-specific developmental processes. Elias's focus on identifying what social processes are universal to the human species and how these manifest themselves in different ways across space and time, according to developmental dynamics which can be traced and understood, constitutes the basis for a grand narrative on human development with a greater explanatory and orientating potential.



In chapter seven, however, we note that the capacity of Elias's detached approach to produce more cosmopolitan grand narratives that avoid the shortcomings of modernist myths, comes at the cost of their orientating potential being limited to their explanatory dimension, i.e. to help human beings better understand their conditions of existence by identifying the predominant social processes which have shaped the long-term process of human development and the globalisation of the species. Such an approach, we argue, does not fulfil critical international theory's parallel normative interest in understanding how grand narratives can orientate human being's political agency in a manner that helps people make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing. Consequently, Elias's process sociology is characterised as only taking us half-way towards a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation.

This observation leads us to make the argument that such an answer requires a higher synthesis between critical theory and process sociology in the context of critical international theory. A synthesis which is capable of weaving together the normative interest of the critical authors in orientating political agency towards the expansion of human self-determination with Elias's explanatory, multi-linear and open-ended conception of human development. This synthesis, we argue, involves the development of research projects which, composed of multi-disciplinary teams of social scientists, seek to fulfil two interweaved objectives. First, the production of more detailed, detached and explanatory analysis of different society-specific developmental processes across the globe and of their long-term intertwinement in longer and more complex webs of human interdependence in the context of an international society which, ultimately, has come to encompass the species as a whole. And second, the assessment of the normative implications of this knowledge and how it might orientate human political agency in a manner that makes it better able to ensure the expansion of conscious control over the networks of human interdependence and avoids a reproduction of relations of violence, domination, exploitation and exclusion between different sections of humankind. In this context, we argue that, given the current levels of human global interdependence and the still inadequate fund of available knowledge about the long-term global interweaving of society-specific developmental processes, orientation towards political agency has to focus on the international society level of analysis. It must explore the immanent potential, and how to actualise it, for the further constitution and development of global institutions that enable

the collective regulation of the networks of interdependent humankind between the several societies into which the species is divided on the basis of the knowledge about processes of human development provided by the proposed synthesis between critical theory and process sociology. This means that critical international theory would orientate political agency regarding the identification and actualisation of the immanent potentials that the long-term process of human development has gathered in the contemporary conditions of global interdependence of the species for the further development of global institutions – such as the human rights regime or the development of global environmental norms – through which the patterns of acceptable behaviour and required self-restraint that should be observed between people and states can be defined in a manner that enables human beings to attain a greater degree of collective and conscious control over their conditions of existence, over the global interweaving of the networks of social interdependence which they constitute and over their hitherto unplanned developmental dynamics. The focus of political agency in the promotion of the development of global institutions is justified because, for a species which has become globally interdependent, only through the deliberative consensualization, between the several societies into which humankind is divided, of the standards of behaviour that they all can accept must be observed, can the successful collective management of the global networks of human interdependence occur. Only in this way can the regulation of human interdependence be carried out in a manner that simultaneously allows these societies, and the human beings who constitute them, to have a greater degree of self-determination over their conditions of existence while reducing relations of violence, domination and exclusion between them. Critical international theory would thus constitute a more adequate means of orientation for human beings caught up in global networks of human interdependence; one which avoids the shortcomings of the critical authors under analysis by clearly emphasizing the prior role of detached social scientific analysis before a more involved assessment of its normative implications can be made, and by distributing the different tasks of more detached or more involved social scientific research between the different members of the envisioned multi-disciplinary teams of social scientists engaged in the study of the human condition.

Given the magnitude and multi-disciplinary character of such an endeavour, it escapes the time and length constraints of the present study to carry out the proposed synthesis between these two approaches. As such, in the last section of chapter seven, we

limit ourselves to take the first, highly tentative, steps towards the establishment of the theoretical basis on which this higher synthesis might be produced in the context of future critical international theory research projects by inquiring into the critical implications of Elias's grand narrative on human development.

The main argument in this study can thus be described as moving in the form of an ascending spiral. We start with the recognition of the need for more cosmopolitan perspectives on the human condition as a way to improve the available means of orientation to people caught in global networks of interdependence. Then, we make an argument about the role of grand narratives in providing such cosmopolitan perspectives and make the case for their recovery in critical international theory. This takes us to an assessment of previous attempts, both in critical theory and in process sociology, at the production of grand narratives in order to identify both their strengths and shortcomings as means of orientation capable of providing a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition. We note that again and again the critical authors have fallen short of this goal and reproduced forms of modernist theorising which hide more parochial and Western-centric perspectives under the cover of their supposed cosmopolitanism. Elias's process sociology helps us understand why this is the case, by noting how these authors' political involvement and commitment to human emancipation blocks their analytical capacity to escape the point of view of their place in time and space, and how their more involved perspectives colour their analysis of the long-term process of human development. Then, we show how Elias's detached approach to grand narratives offers a way out of the modernist trap by providing an analysis of human development in a long-term perspective which is both multi-linear and open-ended and thus achieves a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition. However, we also argue that Elias's more adequate approach to grand narratives also comes at the cost of its orientating function by losing touch with the questions of political agency. This observation takes us, finally, to consider how, on the basis of process sociology's more detached approach to human development, a form of 'secondary re-involvement' can occur which identifies the normative implications of the long-term process of human development and assesses how its knowledge might inform political agency in different times and places envisioning the expansion of human being's control over their conditions of existence in accordance with the immanent potentials that have been historically gathered. The proposes synthesis between critical theory and process

sociology, we argue, would allow critical international theory to achieve a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition, which more adequately orientates people not only in understanding their conditions of existence but also in learning how to achieve a greater degree of control over them in a manner that helps human survival, that makes human life more meaningful and enjoyable and that reduces relations of violence, domination and exclusion between people in the next phase of humankind's global development.

# **Chapter One**

## **Critical theory, orientation and world politics**

In this chapter we explore the conceptual apparatus framing our study. In the first section, we make the case that, under conditions of global interdependence, the human need for orientation requires the development of more cosmopolitan perspectives on the human condition and we clarify what we mean by that notion. In the second section, we connect the attainment of these more cosmopolitan perspectives with the recovery of grand narratives in critical international theory. Then, in the third section, we introduce the process sociological concept of involvement-detachment balance and show how it helps us understand to what extent the grand narratives of the authors under analysis provide an adequate answer to the problem of orientation. Finally, in the fourth section, we demonstrate how the process sociological notion of the triad of controls can serve as a framing device through which we establish a dialogue between the several authors under analysis. This conceptual apparatus then orientates our analysis of Kant, Marx, Habermas and Elias's works in the subsequent chapters.

### **1. Orientation and cosmopolitan perspectives**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines orientation as the act of aligning or positioning something or someone relative to the points of a compass or other specified positions. It relates to the idea of finding one's bearings in relation to unfamiliar surroundings, maintaining its etymological meaning of literally finding the 'orient', i.e. finding the sunrise as a way of locating oneself and one's direction. Even when referring to non-spatial forms of orientation – as when expressing someone's political or sexual orientation – the concept maintains this basic idea of locating a person vis-à-vis something.<sup>2</sup> In political thought, the notion of orientation has played a central role, especially in the work of authors associated with critical theory. It is the core theme in Kant's essay '*What is Orientation in Thinking?*' where he argues that, similarly to people's need to orientate themselves spatially, so too

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<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 1025.

they need to find their bearings in thought.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of spatial directions, orientation in thought depends on ideas that serve as the compass on the basis of which people can direct their capacity for judgement. Here, he mentions the 'rational belief' in an intelligent and limitless creator, who is the source of ultimate morality and good, as one such orientating idea to the extent that only on its basis can people orientate their thought, in the judgement of everything which is limited, in accordance with the conception of a universal and timeless moral law.<sup>4</sup>

According to Kimberly Hutchings, the notion of orientation is not limited to Kant's considerations on speculative thinking but is evident throughout his work and has played a central role in the development of critical theory.<sup>5</sup> It is the underlying theme in Kant's writings on history and politics, which are fundamentally concerned with understanding how human beings can better orientate themselves in the world and in their historical process of development. In this context, Kant's awareness about the growing global interdependence of the human species leads him to the view that the future navigation of human collective life on the planet demands orientating frameworks which are not bound to limited time or spatial horizons, but rather assume the perspective of the species as a whole. Only in this manner can a more adequate understanding be attained of the human condition which is truly cosmopolitan, i.e. species-encompassing, in the sense of allowing an impartial point of view which, by not being locked to the perspective of any particular society or period in history, is capable of assessing the totality of the conditions of human global existence, which implies not only understanding their contemporary manifestation, but also how these have developed throughout history, what future developmental course these might assume and how human beings might collectively intervene in, and shape, that future development. As such, Kant's connection between orientation and cosmopolitanism can be said to possess, on the one hand, a fundamental explanatory character. The identification of a species-encompassing perspective as a requirement for a more adequate understanding of the human condition implies a need for explanatory frameworks that detach from all particularistic points of view, be they those of particular societies or time

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<sup>3</sup> Kant, I. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?' in *Kant: Political Writings*, edited by Hans Reiss, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Kant, I. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', p. 245.

<sup>5</sup> Hutchings, K. 'What is Orientation in Thinking? Time and Timeliness in Cosmopolitan Thought', *Constellations*, 18: 2 (2011) pp. 190-204.

periods. A cosmopolitan perspective thus captures the totality of the human, across space and time, in order to place the contemporary conditions of global interdependence of the species within the flow of very long-term processes of human development and growing global interconnection between human societies, in a manner that recognises that an understanding of the human condition cannot privilege some human groups over others, whatever their positioning in time and space. On the other hand, as Richard Beardsworth notes, such a 'cosmopolitan disposition' is not explanatory per se, but possesses also a fundamental normative character.<sup>6</sup> This normativity, which is understood as inherently implied in the privileged species-encompassing perspective of cosmopolitanism, entails at least three fundamental traits. First, the attempted distance from spatial and temporal particularistic points of view means not only that natural and artificial borders come to be understood as contingent, but also that all forms of ethnic, religious, class or gender particularities come to be regarded as secondary, in favour of a focus on common humanity. Second, the focus on common humanity implies the recognition of the inherent dignity of all human individuals, which, third, places human dignity at the centre of considerations about the future development of the conditions of existence of globalised humanity through global institutional arrangements and global mechanisms of public law.<sup>7</sup> As Beardsworth notes, cosmopolitanism can thus be said to 'hover' between the empirical and the normative. On the one hand, a species-encompassing perspective, which is understood as required for the explanatory understanding of the human condition, implies the normative recognition of the inherent dignity of all human beings, as well as the normative assessment of the global arrangements in which people might acquire a greater degree of collective control over their conditions of existence in a manner that protects and promotes that dignity. On the other hand, this normative vision has 'effects in the real as an ideational guide to human behaviour', effectively orientating human beings in the establishment of global standards, rules and institutions that ensure the dignity of every human individual. This connection between the explanatory and the normative aspects of cosmopolitanism is perhaps best captured in Marx and Engels's observation, in *The German Ideology*, of how,

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<sup>6</sup> Beardsworth, R. *Cosmopolitanism and International Relations Theory* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Beardsworth, R. *Cosmopolitanism and International Relations Theory*, p. 20.

under conditions of human global interdependence, 'modern universal intercourse cannot be controlled by individuals, unless it is controlled by all'.<sup>8</sup>

The connection between orientation and cosmopolitanism can also be identified in the 'critical turn' in International Relations, which reinforced what Beardsworth characterises as the discipline's focus on 'future-oriented theorising' regarding inter-group relations in the context of the 'determinations of the past and the present'.<sup>9</sup> Driven by a shared criticism of mainstream IR, critical international theory authors adopted concepts and perspectives from critical theory – especially with reference to the works of the Frankfurt School and Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant or Marx – through which they attempted to overcome what they perceived as the shortcomings of the discipline's predominant theoretical paradigms. In particular, they strived to produce theoretical approaches to world politics capable of overcoming what later Barry Buzan and Richard Little came to characterize as the 'presentism' of neorealism and neoliberalism.<sup>10</sup> Presentism refers to the short-term and time bound horizons that mainstream perspectives on world politics tended to adopt – usually not exceeding the time frame of a few decades – under the assumption that world politics could be explained through an analysis of their present characteristics alone.<sup>11</sup> These perspectives had the underlying implication of dismissing an analysis of what world politics had been in the past, how they came to assume their contemporary form, and what they could potentially become in the future. The notion of change was thus remarkably absent from mainstream approaches, with the contemporary characteristics of world politics – such as the recognition of the state as the predominant form of political organisation, or the condition of anarchy in inter-state relations – being identified as essential and immutable conditions of human existence, emphasising what Buzan and Little characterised as the 'anarchocentrism' of these

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<sup>8</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology* (New York, Prometheus Books, 1998), p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> Beardsworth, R. 'Political Vision in the Discipline of International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 40: 3 (2012) pp. 541-561. Three works are frequently referenced as initiating the critical turn in International Relations: Ashley, R. 'Political Realism and Human Interests', *International Studies Quarterly*, 25: 2 (1981) pp. 204-236; Cox, R. 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, 10: 2 (1981) pp. 126-155; Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (London, Macmillan, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> Buzan, B. and Little, R. *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> One of the highest exponents of such a position is the neorealist theory advanced by Kenneth Waltz. See: Waltz, K. *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2001) and Waltz, K. *Theory of International Politics* (London, McGraw-Hill, 1979).



approaches.<sup>12</sup> As John Hobson observes, mainstream IR simultaneously failed to recognise the 'uniqueness' of contemporary world politics and 'obscured' their past.<sup>13</sup> In this manner, it did a 'disservice' to the understanding of both the past and the present of the human condition.<sup>14</sup> In the context of our present concerns, it can be argued that mainstream IR failed to constitute an adequate framework of orientation on the basis of which the study of world politics could be carried out and a better understanding achieved of the conditions of existence of human beings on the planet. Instead, it was a frequent source of disorientation, to the extent that its assumptions about the immutability of world politics or of the inherent conflictual character of relations between people organised as states, veiled an awareness of the possibilities for change in world politics and for the development of forms of political organisation which might enable a greater degree of regulation and amelioration of violence in inter-group conflicts and encounters.

Contrasting with mainstream theoretical perspectives, the critical turn in IR can be read as striving to improve the adequacy of the discipline's frameworks of orientation by placing the notion of change at the centre of its approach in a manner that enables it to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on world politics and the conditions of existence of globalised humanity. It does not understand contemporary world politics as manifesting a set of immutable characteristics that comprise human existence across space and time, but rather seeks to understand how the prevailing order came about and has been constituted through a long-term process of human development. In Robert Cox's characterisation, critical international theory tries to develop a 'theory of history' in the sense of being concerned 'with the continuing process of historical change'.<sup>15</sup> Echoing Horkheimer's distinction between traditional and critical theory, Cox observes that the 'ahistorical' character of mainstream IR theory makes it inherently 'conservative', to the extent that its assumptions about the immutability of world politics lead it to produce perspectives which, even if unintentionally, serve the 'particular national, sectional, or class interests, which are

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<sup>12</sup> Buzan, B. and Little, R. *International Systems in World History*.

<sup>13</sup> Hobson, J. 'What's at stake in 'bringing historical sociology *back* into international relations'? Transcending 'chronofetishism' and 'tempocentrism' in International Relations' in *Historical Sociology and International Relations*, edited by Stephen Hobden and John Hobson, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Hobson, J. 'What's at stake in 'bringing historical sociology *back* into international relations'?', p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Cox, R. 'Social Forces, States and World Orders', p. 129.

comfortable within the given order'.<sup>16</sup> By recognising that all perspectives are inherently circumscribed by the historical conditions in which they are produced, critical IR 'contains' mainstream approaches within itself and its conception of the long-term process of human development.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it is 'self-reflexive' about its own conditions of knowledge production, constantly recognising the limited and time bound perspectives which it advances. Through such reflexivity, critical international theory strives to achieve a 'perspective on perspectives' that functions as a more adequate framework of orientation permitting not only a better understanding of certain aspects or periods of world politics, but of how 'both the parts and the whole' are involved in a continuous process of change.<sup>18</sup>

As Linklater argues, critical international theory ultimately searches for the development of a 'conceptual system concerned with the affairs of the species in its entirety'.<sup>19</sup> It aspires for the attainment of a cosmopolitan perspective from the point of view of which the whole process of human development – not only in its past and present manifestations, but also in its potential futures – can be understood. In Linklater's assessment, such cosmopolitanism is 'revolutionary' to the extent that it desires what no particularistic perspective can supply; a 'politics of impartiality' which takes all humans into account irrespective of the society or the time period to which they belong.<sup>20</sup> Critical IR thus strives to develop a more species-encompassing perspective on world politics that captures the predominant social processes shaping the progressive globalisation of the political, social, economic, environmental, moral and emotional life of the species, and that might function as a more adequate and less particularistic means of orientation. It reproduces Kant's call for a universal history from a cosmopolitan perspective as an orientating framework through which people might better find their bearings in the world, better attune to each other under conditions of global interdependence, and learn how to more consciously navigate the future stages of their collective process of historical development.

Common to all critical authors in IR is thus the awareness that the development of a more cosmopolitan standpoint of orientation fulfils not only an explanatory role, but also carries with it inherent normative implications. First, it necessarily questions the practices of

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<sup>16</sup> Cox, R. 'Social Forces, States and World Orders', p. 129. See also: Horkheimer, A. 'Traditional and Critical Theory' in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York, The Continuum Publishing Company, 2002) pp. 188-243.

<sup>17</sup> Cox, R. 'Social Forces, States and World Orders', p. 130.

<sup>18</sup> Cox, R. 'Social Forces, States and World Orders', p. 128-129.

<sup>19</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 49.

exclusion between self-regarding political communities and how these promote limited emotional identification between people belonging to different societies in a manner that generates and legitimates forms of violence, exclusion, and domination in their mutual relations. And second, by recognising the historically changeable character of human beings, it highlights their capacity to transform social relations, and thus to acquire some degree of self-determination over their conditions of existence. In this context, critical international theory authors observe that as long as people remain estranged from one another through their membership of self-regarding political communities, and to direct themselves in the world in accordance with orientating frameworks that express particularistic points of view and are complicit with dominant relations of power and exclusion, they will remain subject to the violent conflicts and mutual injustices that characterize world politics and that constantly undermine their common human dignity.<sup>21</sup> The overall lack of adequate orientation in thinking about world politics thus implies that human beings will continue to be unable to 'enjoy a social and political world subject to their control and responsive to their capacity for individual and collective self-determination'.<sup>22</sup>

Critical international theory's normative thrust thus entails not only a critique of particularism inherent in its search for a more cosmopolitan standpoint of orientation but also a normative commitment to the expression of the human capacity for self-determination and the reduction of relations of domination and exclusion between people. It implies what Beardsworth refers to as 'big picture political vision' that seeks proactive intervention in the future by providing a cosmopolitan perspective that promotes change in the reciprocal behaviour between nations, international organisations and individuals.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, critical IR shares the normative commitment expressed in the work of critical authors such as Kant and Marx who envision the future possibility of a 'universal society of free individuals' – co-extensive with humanity itself – which respects and protects each person's natural right to life, dignity and freedom.<sup>24</sup>

Following Benhabib, we can thus argue that the connection operated between the notions of orientation and cosmopolitanism in critical international theory possesses two

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<sup>21</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Beardsworth, R. 'Political Vision in the Discipline of International Relations', p. 543. See also: Beardsworth, R. *Cosmopolitanism and International Relations Theory*.

<sup>24</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 30.

main dimensions.<sup>25</sup> First, it has an 'explanatory-diagnostic' dimension, which is concerned with the production of theoretical frameworks that are capable of capturing the predominant social processes shaping the historical development of the human species. These frameworks fulfil an orientating function to the extent that they provide people with a better understanding of the social forces which have, so far, predominantly shaped the human conditions of existence, throughout a long-term and largely unplanned process of development, up to the contemporary global interdependence of the species. And second, Benhabib identifies the 'anticipatory-utopian' dimension, which is engaged with the normative identification of the potential gathered by this long-term process for the further actualization of people's capacity for self-determination, as well as with assessing what the past reveals about the future potentialities of the species. This identification fulfils an orientating function to the extent that it helps people better understand how, and through what forms of political agency, they might achieve a greater degree of collective and conscious control over their conditions of existence and the future course of their process of development. As Benhabib observes, this second dimension is inseparable from the explanatory dimension insofar as critical international theory is not pursuing the production of a moralistic account of a utopian world, uncoupled from the history of humankind. Rather, it is interested in the development of an orientating framework that achieves a species-encompassing perspective capable of capturing the actual dynamics of human development in all its aspects, and in all its temporal and spatial expressions, on the basis of which it can identify the realistic possibilities for human emancipation, as these have been gathered in particular historical contexts, as well as orientate political agency towards their actualisation. Without this explanatory dimension, 'critical theory dissolves into mere normative philosophy; [while] if it excludes the dimension of anticipatory-utopian critique, it cannot be distinguished from other mainstream social theories that attempt to gain value-free knowledge of the social world'.<sup>26</sup> Critical international theory, with its search for a cosmopolitan perspective, can thus be said to constantly negotiate between the empirical and the normative, between the explanatory assessment of the historical conditions of

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<sup>25</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 142.

<sup>26</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 142.

human existence and the anticipatory projection of the immanent potential for human freedom these have gathered in the context of an open future.<sup>27</sup>

As already mentioned, the type of cosmopolitan orientation which we identify as required to help human beings find their bearings under conditions of human global interdependence strives to overcome all forms of particularistic perspective which are locked to particular temporal, spatial or cultural points of view. Consequently, the cosmopolitan orientation here defended cannot be found only through an assessment of the contemporary conditions of existence of the human species, or through the mutual opening up of perspectives between present-day human societies. Rather, it demands the capacity to produce theoretical frameworks that encompass the whole course of human development and thus can frame the contemporary conditions of human global interdependence in the long-term process of global interweaving of human societies. The achievement of a more cosmopolitan perspective in critical international theory is thus understood as being inherently connected with the recovery of grand narratives in its context. A recovery which, as we see in greater detail in the next section, places CIT before a fundamental problem.

## **2. Grand narratives and the problem of orientation**

Grand narratives are here understood as very long-term accounts of human development which strive to achieve a more cosmopolitan – in the sense of species-encompassing – perspective that fulfils both an explanatory and an anticipatory orientating function. The concept is borrowed from Jean-François Lyotard who, in *The Postmodern Condition*, defines grand narratives as possessing both a descriptive and a prescriptive character.<sup>28</sup> This characterisation echoes the two dimension of orientation above identified and, according to Lyotard, implies that the explanatory description of the long-term course of human history, and of its potential future development, fulfils an orientating function by not only helping contemporary human beings interpret their conditions of existence and find their bearings

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<sup>27</sup> Beardsworth, R. *Cosmopolitanism in International Relations Theory*, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> Lyotard, J. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

in the world but also by legitimising the normative assessment of what forms of political agency can expand human self-determination in the future.

In this context, it is important to briefly note that an interest in long-term perspectives on human development is shared with several non-critical approaches – both within IR, and in other areas of social inquiry – that focus predominantly on their explanatory role and which tend to put less emphasis on an assessment of their anticipatory dimension. Within International Relations, but outside critical international theory, there has been a renewed interest in long-term perspectives in the works of authors striving for a higher synthesis between International Relations and Historical Sociology, such as Buzan and Little<sup>29</sup>; John Hobson<sup>30</sup>; Buzan and George Lawson<sup>31</sup>; Yale Ferguson and Richard Manbach<sup>32</sup>; Kees van der Pijl<sup>33</sup>, Ken Dark<sup>34</sup> or Joseph Camilleri and Jim Falk<sup>35</sup>. Outside International Relations, long-term perspectives have also continued to be pursued within different theoretical traditions. Worth mentioning – beyond the now classical works of Immanuel Wallerstein<sup>36</sup>, Charles Tilly<sup>37</sup>, Michael Mann<sup>38</sup> or the Annales School<sup>39</sup> – are the works in ‘new global history’ developed by Bruce Mazlish<sup>40</sup>; David Christian’s ‘Big History’ project<sup>41</sup>; or Norbert Elias’s process sociology.<sup>42</sup>

In critical international theory itself, the connection between cosmopolitanism and grand narratives is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the work of Andrew Linklater. Linklater’s argument is that grand narratives play a fundamental role in critical international

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<sup>29</sup> Buzan, B. and Little, R. *International Systems in World History*.

<sup>30</sup> Hobson, J. *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Buzan, B. and Lawson, G. *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Ferguson, Y. and Mansbach, R. *Remapping Global Politics: History’s Revenge and Future Shock* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Van der Pijl, K., *Nomads, Empires, States: Modes of Foreign Relations and Political Economy* (London, Pluto Press, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Dark, K. *Waves of Time: Long-Term Change and International Relations* (London, Bloomsbury, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Camilleri, J. and Falk, J. *Worlds in Transition: Evolving Governance Across a Stressed Planet* (Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Wallerstein, I. *The Modern World-System 3 vols.* (California, University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Tilly, C. *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990 - 1992* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> Mann, M. *The Sources of Social Power 4 vols.* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> See: Burke, P. *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-1989* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> Mazlish, B. *The New Global History* (New York, Routledge, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Christian, D. *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (London, University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* [Collected Works, vol. 3] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2012).

theory to the extent that, by providing accounts of the long and collective struggle of the species to tame natural forces and create larger civilised social systems, they promote 'cosmopolitan dispositions and perspectives', which might encourage greater mutual identification between people and reduce the 'lethality of inter-group encounters'.<sup>43</sup> With this observation, Linklater brings together both the explanatory and the anticipatory dimensions of grand narratives and can thus be regarded as making a case concerning their orientating function by helping people better understand themselves and the social processes which they constitute as well as how to more consciously navigate and control their future development.

Linklater's position on grand narratives has led him to engage in their attempted recovery in the context of critical international theory and to inquire how they might play an important role in the further development of critical approaches to world politics. Relying in particular on the grand narratives of Kant, Marx and Habermas, Linklater has shown how the problem of political community in world politics can be reconceptualised when framed in a long-term perspective.<sup>44</sup> This reconceptualization is seen to imply the complementarity between the explanatory analysis of the changing boundaries of political community throughout history, with the normative critique of particularistic, self-regarding and exclusionary forms of political community, as well as the assessment of the immanent potentials of modernity for the expansion of the boundaries of moral identification between people beyond the frontiers of sovereign states. More recently, Linklater has continued his engagement with grand narratives on human development through Elias's process sociology. Elias's studies on the process of civilisation are used to carry out an explanatory analysis of the long-term process of development of political community in the Western system of states and an anticipatory identification of the immanent potentials gathered in contemporary world politics for the further development of a 'global civilising process',

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<sup>43</sup> Linklater, A. 'Grand narratives and International Relations', *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 21: 1 (2009) p. 12. See also: Linklater, A. 'Long-term Patterns of Change in Human Interconnectedness: A View from International Relations', *Human Figurations: Long-term perspectives on the human condition*, 1: 1 (2012).

<sup>44</sup> See: Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*; Linklater, A. *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations* (London, Macmillan Press, 1990); Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1998).

expressed in the emergence of cosmopolitan sensibilities and the constitution of 'cosmopolitan harm conventions'.<sup>45</sup>

However, the recourse to grand narratives in critical international theory has not been consensual amongst its authors, with many finding it a highly problematic approach to the development of the critical study of world politics. The problematic status of grand narratives in CIT is connected with its understanding of human knowledge and perspective-taking as necessarily influenced by people's particular positioning in space, time and in the social, cultural and material contexts of their societies. As such, critical international theory is constantly engaged in locating knowledge statements and perspectives within the flow of historical change, identifying the extent to which these represent particularistic points of view embedded in specific temporal, spatial, societal and cultural contexts. Consequently, it assumes a predominantly sceptical attitude towards all statements pertaining to represent a cosmopolitan, species-encompassing, perspective which has uncoupled from particularistic society and time bound points of view. Such scepticism has led, for example, to Hutchings's critique of Linklater's work with the argument that he failed to safeguard against, and actually reproduced, some of the problems inherent in the grand narratives of Kant and Habermas.<sup>46</sup> In particular, Hutchings considers that these grand narratives, on which Linklater's work relies substantially, reproduce forms of theorising that pose the path of human development in Western European societies as a universal expression of the development of the human species as a whole. Consequently, they advance what is actually a highly particularistic, society and time bound perspective on the human condition under the cover of their supposed cosmopolitanism. This perspective supports a progressivist, linear and teleological understanding of human historical development in which the West is seen as leading world-historical time and as assuming a central role in the definition of the future of the species. According to Hutchings, such a perspective inherently perceives non-Western contemporary societies as non-contemporaneous, i.e. as expressions of the past of human development. As such, Hutchings argues, the supposed cosmopolitanism of these authors' grand narratives instead serves – even if unintentionally – as a legitimating device

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<sup>45</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics: Theoretical investigations* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011); Linklater, A. 'International Society and the Civilising Process', *Ritsumaiken International Affairs*, 9 (2011) pp. 1-26 and Linklater, A. *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States System* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>46</sup> Hutchings, K. 'World Politics and the Question of Progress', *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History*, 8, (2004) pp. 211-234; Hutchings, K. *Kant, Critique and Politics*, pp. 153-158.



of parochial and ethnocentric points of view that underline practices of exclusion and support paternalistic and dominating relations between the Western and the non-Western parts of humanity, which confirms the particularism of these grand narratives as well as their lack of adequacy as a means of orientation.<sup>47</sup> Grand narratives are thus frequently understood in critical international theory as incurring in the same shortcomings and producing the same type of disorientation as mainstream IR theory, insofar as their assumption of a supposedly cosmopolitan perspective actually veils society and time bound practices of exclusion and domination and hides the interconnection between specific forms of knowledge and relations of power.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, contemporary critical international theory has come to share its post-structuralist counterpart's 'incredulity' towards grand narratives.<sup>49</sup>

In this context, two different responses can be identified in CIT's relation with grand narratives. The most predominant response, as a reading of the major journals in International Relations in the past few years will demonstrate, consists in dismissing an engagement with grand narratives on human development to instead focus on the study of contemporary world politics, and in the application of a critical perspective to particular issues, highlighting the huge diversity of possible narratives on the human condition. This approach has the advantage of avoiding the dangers of grand narratives by constantly

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<sup>47</sup> Hutchings, K. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', pp. 190-204. See also: Devetak, R. 'Vico Contra Kant: The Competing Critical Theories of Cox and Linklater' in *Critical Theory in International Relations and Security Studies*, edited by Shannon Brincat, João Nunes, and Laura Lima (London, Routledge, 2012), pp. 115-128. For Linklater's defence, stressing how Habermas's principle of discourse ethics is capable of avoiding the reproduction of Western-centric grand narratives see: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*. Modernist grand narratives tend to incur in what Richard Devetak characterises as the assumption of the possibility of identifying the origins and meanings of history objectively. They ignore 'the idea that all knowledge is situated in a particular time and place and issues from a particular perspective'. As such, their linear and teleological model of human development disregards how the heterogeneity of possible contexts and positions means that 'there can be no single, Archimedean perspective which trumps all others [and that] there is no truth, only competing perspectives'. As Devetak notes, this critique of grand narratives is particularly evident in Foucault's work to whom there is no 'single, grand history, but many interwoven histories' characterised by the 'endlessly repeated play of dominations'. This position does not necessarily imply a refusal to engage in long-term perspectives but entails a focus in using history not for the constitution of more universal identities but rather to highlight excluded narratives, to disturb identities that have become dogmatized and normalized, and to expose how perspectives which portray themselves as universal hide particularistic and parochial points of view. See: Devetak, R. 'Post-structuralism' in *Theories of International Relations*, edited by Scott Burchill et al. (Hampshire, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), pp. 183-211. For similar critiques of grand narratives see also: Foucault, M. 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York, Pantheon Books, 1984) pp. 76-100 and Ashley, R. 'The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics', *Alternatives*, 12: 4 (1987) pp. 404-434.

<sup>48</sup> Hutchings, K. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', pp.190-204.

<sup>49</sup> See: Lyotard, J. *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv.

recognising the partiality and the societal and temporal embedded character of all perspectives. The focus of CIT's research thus shifts from the attainment of a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition to instead produce highly specialised knowledge on specific aspects of contemporary world politics that recognise, identify and express the plurality of perspectives that characterise humankind, as well as show how all of these perspectives share the fundamental fact of their partiality and embeddedness in specific social and temporal contexts.

However, we might ask how such an approach is at all able to fulfil an orientating function. The identification of the plurality of existent perspectives on the human condition, without being framed in a wider account of their long-term process of development throughout the history of the species and the interweaving of human societies, tends itself to lead to a reification of these perspectives as immutable, self-enclosed facts of human social existence. Critical international theory thus ends up reproducing the shortcomings of mainstream IR theory by losing its capacity to understand the flow of human change, and to acquire what Cox characterises as a 'perspective on perspectives'.<sup>50</sup> When the goal of social scientific research becomes the development of specialised knowledge and the expression of a plurality of society-specific perspectives without being coupled by parallel efforts at synthesis and at bringing these various perspectives together in a wider account of the human condition and of how these perspectives themselves are the product of the long-term process of human development, its capacity to provide orientation to human beings by helping them better understand their conditions of existence and how to exercise greater conscious control over them in the future becomes fundamentally undermined. This is because it loses the capacity to understand the historical development of these perspectives, their role as means of orientation to human behaviour, as well as their potentials for change and for mutual opening up in ways that enable the development of common frameworks of orientation between human societies that serve as a basis for more cooperative, and less violent and dominating relations between human beings. Hence, the focus on the plurality of contemporary perspectives becomes a one-sided effort which, while preventing against the shortcomings of grand narratives, also compromises CIT's capacity to help human beings understand their conditions of existence, how these have

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<sup>50</sup> Cox, R. 'Social Forces, States and World Orders', p. 129.

come to be what they are, and what immanent potentials have been gathered by the long-term process of human historical development for the opening up of society-specific perspectives to each other in a manner that enables greater attunement between people and their societies and the development of common frameworks of orientation on the basis of which human beings might collectively bring under greater control their conditions of globally interdependent existence.

As Kimberly Hutchings notes, under conditions of human global interdependence, the orientating function of critical international theory depends not only on the identification of the plurality of perspectives on the human condition, but also in their mutual opening up, in a manner that enables them not only to recognise their respective partiality, but also to identify their similarities, on the basis of which they might develop a common, collaborative and more cosmopolitan orientation towards the world.<sup>51</sup> This observation takes us to the second approach to grand narratives in critical international theory, which is most evident in Linklater's work.<sup>52</sup> This approach asks to what extent the majority of contemporary CIT, by retreating from the project of developing long-term perspectives on human development, has not incurred in a 'retreat into the present', similar to the one that the process sociologist Norbert Elias identified in the sociology of the later twentieth century and that has effectively thrown the 'baby out with the bathwater' and too quickly dismissed the role that grand narratives might have in the development of critical international theory.<sup>53</sup> It argues that CIT's contemporary focus on the recognition and expression of a plurality of perspectives on the human condition needs to be accompanied by parallel efforts towards synthesis, which inquire how these various perspectives can be brought together in a more encompassing 'perspective on perspectives', on the basis of which they can open up to each other, and come to greater agreement – without implying homogeneity – on both their assessment of the constitutive features of the human condition and of what forms of political agency are immanent,

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<sup>51</sup> Hutchings, K. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', p. 201.

<sup>52</sup> It is also worth mentioning ongoing collaborative research projects which might signal a renewed interest in long-term perspectives in critical International Relations; see: Anievas, A. and Nisancioglu, K. *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London, Pluto, 2015); Anievas, A.; Davidson, N. Fabry, A. Saull, R. (eds.) *The Longue Durée of the Far-Right: An International Historical Sociology* (London, Routledge, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Linklater, A. 'Grand narratives and International Relations'. See also: Elias, N. 'The retreat of sociologists into the present' in *Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities* [Collected Works, vol. 16] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2009), pp. 107-126 and Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 511.

possible and legitimate – under conditions of human global interdependence – through which human beings can attain a greater degree of self-determination over their lives and the social processes which they constitute. Grand narratives on human development are understood as playing a fundamental role in this process, to the extent that, by framing the contemporary conditions of human global interdependence, together with the plurality of society-specific perspectives which constitute them, in the long-term process of their historical development, they facilitate the mutual opening up of these different perspectives, helping them understand each other, their mutual development and identify their similarities, differences and points of agreement and disagreement. Grand narratives are thus seen as fulfilling a fundamental role in the development of more encompassing perspectives on the human condition, which have a reinforced orientating function in both its explanatory and anticipatory dimensions. Such an approach, however, is fully aware of the dangers inherent in grand narratives and how these might serve as a vehicle for the legitimization of more parochial points of view under the cover of cosmopolitanism. Consequently, it is focused on understanding how a recovery of grand narratives in the context of critical international theory might be possible, without reproducing the shortcomings with which they are usually associated.

This is clearly expressed in Linklater's work, when he uses Kant, Marx and Habermas's grand narratives to think through the problem of political community in world politics, while avoiding a reproduction of what he sees as the shortcomings of teleology and linear progressivism in Kant and Marx's works by framing them in Habermas's critical theory and principles of discourse ethics. Our approach to grand narratives in this study follows Linklater's approach, while trying to develop upon it by exploring in greater detail the role of grand narratives in the development of critical international theory as a means of orientation. As such, we can say that this study runs parallel to Linklater's work in two ways. On the one hand, it shares Linklater's project for the recovery of grand narratives in critical international theory. And on the other hand, by framing its discussion of grand narratives in the context of the problem of orientation, it moves beyond Linklater's own work by carrying out a more in-depth assessment of exactly to what extent the work of authors such as Kant, Marx, Habermas, or even Elias, can be considered to provide important insights for the development of more adequate means of orientation in the critical study of world politics, or if they actually reflect approaches to human history and world politics that reproduce the

shortcomings and the mythological character of modernist grand narratives. Despite the fact that Linklater, especially in his earlier work, also addresses how to avoid the teleology and linear progressivism of Kant and Marx, his focus has been predominantly on the problem of political community in world politics and not so much on understanding how and why each of these authors' grand narratives has contributed, or hindered, the attainment of a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition which fulfils an orientating function.<sup>54</sup> This is particularly clear in Linklater's later work, in the context of his engagement with Elias's process sociology, which has not assessed in particular depth how Elias's approach relates to that of the critical authors, to what extent it contributes to the recovery of grand narratives which avoid their modernist shortcomings, or what are the critical implications of Elias's analysis of human development in a long-term perspective.<sup>55</sup>

These observations take us to the last two sections of this chapter, where we addressed how the Eliasian concepts of 'involvement–detachment balance' and the 'triad of controls' constitute important heuristic devices in our reading of our chosen authors, which helps us better understand how their work contributes for a recovery of grand narratives in critical international theory in a manner that reinforces its role as a means of orientation.

### **3. Involvement and detachment**

The notion of involvement–detachment balance is used by Elias to capture what the process sociologist considers to be a fundamental dynamic present in all processes of human knowledge production. It highlights how human beings can exhibit more or less involved perspectives of the world and their conditions of existence, which means that their perspectives can be more or less expressive of their personal or communal temporal, spatial, cultural or social positioning, as well as of their associated wishes, fears and emotionally coloured views of themselves, their social groups and the world.<sup>56</sup> In particular, Elias applies the concepts of involvement and detachment to address the extent to which social scientists are able step back from their particular social groups' self-images and

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<sup>54</sup> See: Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*; Linklater, A. *Beyond Realism and Marxism*; Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*.

<sup>55</sup> See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*.

<sup>56</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment* [Collected Works, vol. 8] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2007), p. 71.

conceptions of the world, and develop analysis of social processes which are more detached and less time and society bound.<sup>57</sup>

In this context, he notes that the relation between more detached and more involved perspectives cannot be conceptualized as an opposition between absolute value-freedom and total submission to emotional attachments and particularistic points of view.<sup>58</sup> Instead, it is better understood in the form of a balance at the level of people's personality structures which can assume different forms. For example, more involved perspectives to knowing the world are predominantly shaped by heteronomous considerations – in the form of the immediate interests, fears and wishes of the researchers and their communities – while more detached perspectives are predominantly informed by a more autonomous and critically-minded attitude concerned with the development of a more adequate understanding of the actual processes and dynamics shaping the universe, whether or not these clash with the researchers' prior involvements.<sup>59</sup> This greater detachment, however, does not entail an abandonment of involvement. As the balance tilts towards a more detached perspective, there also occurs a transformation of the researchers' emotional and evaluative involvements in a process Elias calls 'secondary re-involvement'.<sup>60</sup> This means that people's perspectives are no longer shaped only by particularistic personal and communal interests and concerns, but increasingly assume a more detached perspective which frames their particularistic society and time bound points of view in the context of a wider account of interconnected social processes which, tendentially, encompasses the human species as a whole. In this context, new types of involvement tend to arise from a more detached scientific analysis. On the one hand, the search for the actual dynamics shaping the object of inquiry and the development of critical attitudes towards findings now appear as values in themselves, about which people can feel extremely involved and emotionally invested in. In this context, Elias argues that while the typical questions of a predominantly involved approach to knowledge production are essentially ego- and community-centred, such as, 'What does this mean for me or for us?', the questions characterising a more detached perspective are more centred on the object of research

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<sup>57</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 71.

<sup>58</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 71.

<sup>59</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 71.

<sup>60</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 72.

itself, such as, 'What is it?' or 'How are these events connected with others?'.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, people's involvements also come to express a more cosmopolitan perspective, which arises from their growing awareness of the interconnectedness of social processes and human societies, and leads them to become increasingly concerned not only with the interests of their particular social groups and political communities, but rather to exhibit more encompassing modes of attunement towards the interconnected interests of the species as a whole; namely, demonstrating concern regarding the conditions of existence of human beings everywhere and how they might come to exercise a greater degree of conscious control over their lives.<sup>62</sup>

There are clear parallels between Elias's analysis of the involvement–detachment balance and critical international theory's engagement with the problem of orientation. Both identify a connection between people's capacity to attain a more detached or cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition and the adequacy of their means of orientation. And both understand how more involved perspectives, which express the particularistic points of view of specific social groups or time periods, frequently hide and legitimise relations of power, domination and exclusion between people. In this context, the project for the recovery of grand narratives as a means of orientation in critical international theory can be understood as an attempt to produce theoretical frameworks that promote a new involvement–detachment balance at the level of people's personality structures. One which enables them to step back from the particular self-images of their social groups and time periods and to develop a more detached and cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition, on the basis of which people can better orientate themselves to the reality of their global interdependence and to how they might collectively exercise a greater degree of conscious control over the unplanned and frequently harmful social processes that affect the species as a whole.

Elias's conception of the involvement–detachment balance thus reveals itself to be particularly adequate in the context of our inquiry into the problem of orientation. It helps us assess the extent to which each of the authors under analysis exhibits more involved or more detached perspectives on the conditions of existence of globalised humanity and whether indeed they are able to develop a more cosmopolitan means of orientation

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<sup>61</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 72.

<sup>62</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 72. See also: Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 174.

without reproducing the modernist shortcomings of grand narratives that legitimize the more parochial self-images and points of view of their societies and time periods. In this manner, we use the concept of involvement–detachment balance in our reinterpretation of the classical texts of Kant, Marx, Habermas and Elias. In particular, this concept can be linked to the two dimensions of the problem of orientation to assess whether the authors under analysis are able to achieve an involvement–detachment balance in their work which: 1) enables a more detached answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation by developing a more cosmopolitan perspective regarding the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping the species' history; and 2) on the basis of this more cosmopolitan perspective, carries out a secondary re-involvement which avoids a reproduction of modernist forms of myth and more adequately addresses the anticipatory dimension of orientation regarding how human beings might expand their powers of self-determination.

Throughout the first five chapters of this study we address how each of critical authors' under analysis can be read as striving to achieve a more adequate involvement–detachment balance in their grand narratives which, on the one hand, captures the predominant social processes shaping human development – and thus helps people between understand their conditions of existence – and, on the other hand, informs a more involved assessment of the immanent potentials for the expansion of human self-determination which have been gathered in their particular historical contexts, and what forms of political agency are required to actualise them. We note that despite each of the critical authors' striving towards this goal, they constantly fall short of the more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition to which they aspire, with their grand narratives remaining locked in more involved points of view by advancing teleological and linear progressivist models of the long-term process of human development which place their own societies and time periods at the centre of world-historical time.

In chapter six, and with reference to Elias's process sociology, we re-read the failings of the critical authors as deriving from the way in which their normative commitments to human emancipation, and their focus on providing orientation towards political agency, appear in their work as values which have priority over that of detached social scientific analysis. As such, Kant, Marx and Habermas tend to analyse the long-term process of human development from the perspective of their own, more involved, concerns, wishes and fears, in a manner that not only tends to ignore its multi-linear and open-ended character, but



also how it might actually possess characteristics that undermine their favoured images of an emancipated human future.

We then demonstrate how Elias's emphasis on the need for a prior 'detour via detachment', before more involved concerns with political agency towards human emancipation are pursued, actually enables him to develop a more adequate answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation than the critical authors. Elias's approach to grand narratives abandons the critical authors' linear and teleological models of human development, and can actually be said to abandon the narrative form of analysis, which underline their grand narratives. Instead, Elias focuses on the identification of 'universal social processes', and of the dynamics shaping their development in different directions and in society-specific ways, throughout the history of the species. This enables Elias to produce a multi-linear and open-ended model of human development that more successfully detaches from his own particularistic point of view in history and thus permits the attainment of a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition with a greater orientating potential in what regards helping human beings better understand their conditions of existence.

However, in chapter seven we note that Elias's detour via detachment remains unable to provide an answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation unless it is followed by his envisioned secondary re-involvement; one which assesses the normative implications of Elias's multi-linear and open-ended grand narrative and how it might inform forms of political agency envisioning an expansion of human beings' conscious control over their lives and the networks of global interdependence which they constitute. This observation leads us to argue for a higher synthesis between critical theory and process sociology in the context of critical international theory, which reinforces the latter's role as a means of orientation. Through this synthesis, critical international theory would be able to attain a more detached, cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition which provides, on the one hand, an explanatory understanding of long-term term process of human development, that captures its multi-linear and open-ended character, and through which the contemporary conditions of global interdependence of the species came to be what they are and, on the other hand, an involved, anticipatory assessment of the immanent potential for an expansion of human self-determination as well as an identification of what forms of contemporary political agency are required to actualise it. As argued in chapter

seven, this synthesis implies the constitution of multi-disciplinary teams of scholars that divide functions between more detached social scientific research and the assessment of its involved implications. Furthermore, the magnitude of such an endeavour leads us to focus our analysis in chapter seven on a consideration of the normative implications of Elias's own grand narrative on human development in a way that establishes theoretical links between critical theory and process sociology that enable carrying out the proposed synthesis between these two approaches in future research projects in the context of critical international theory.

#### **4. The triad of controls**

Another Eliasian concept that informs our study and needs to be addressed before we begin our analysis of the chosen authors in earnest is the notion of the 'triad of controls'. This concept is here argued to capture a fundamental aspect of both the explanatory and the anticipatory dimensions of orientation, which is the identification of 'control' as both a constituting feature of the human condition and a goal of critical interventions in the process of human development. This is a notion which is common to both critical theory and process sociology, and that plays a fundamental role in the attempted recovery of grand narratives in critical international theory as a way to reinforce its role as a means of orientation.

The link between orientation and control lies at the core of critical theory's conception of humans as historical beings with an ability – which distinguishes them from other animal species on the planet – to 'enlarge their freedom through the ever increasing rational control over their selves and their environment, [through which they are able to] live in a world of their own making'.<sup>63</sup> Such conception can be traced back to the works of Kant, Marx and Habermas to whom one of the distinguishing features of the human species is the greater capacity to control its conditions of existence. In these authors' assessment the long-term process of human development can in part be understood as the history of the development of the human powers of control, even though each of them places different emphasis on different types of control and their mutual interconnections. Kant

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<sup>63</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 135.

highlights in particular the development of human beings' self-control over their more animalic internal drives and impulses and its connection with the conscious and moral regulation of the social bounds of human interdependence.<sup>64</sup> Marx emphasises control over non-human nature and how it connects with the production of the material and social conditions of existence of the species.<sup>65</sup> And Habermas focuses on the connection between intersubjective communication and control over social processes.<sup>66</sup> None of these authors completely ignores the types of control highlighted by the others, even though their emphasis changes regarding to which types of control they attribute greater explanatory weight in their accounts of the long-term process of human development.

Furthermore, the notion of control serves not only an explanatory role in these authors' grand narratives but also as the normative goal of their anticipatory assessment of the immanent potential for the future expansion of human self-determination. Kant, Marx and Habermas share an understanding of human historical development as possessing a fundamental dialectical character, in which the expansion of human beings' control over their conditions of existence is interwoven with the emergence of new forms of domination and exclusion between people. For example, Kant observes how the development of people's rational control over their internal inclinations is accompanied by a greater capacity to apply that same rationality to the pursuit of the satisfaction of their more animalic and destructive impulses. Hence, he argues that human moral progress throughout history is concomitant with the development of greater destructive powers over longer distances and new forms of barbaric warfare in inter-group conflicts.<sup>67</sup> Marx refers to how the growth of the human capacity to control non-human nature is connected with the development of highly intricate global networks of production that reinstates new forms of oppression and exclusion between people.<sup>68</sup> And Habermas notes that the historical development of democratic forms of social integration is accompanied by the establishment

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<sup>64</sup> See: Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason* (London, Longman's, 1889); Kant, I. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* or Kant, I. 'Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose'.

<sup>65</sup> See: Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology* or Marx, K. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (London, Penguin Books, 1992).

<sup>66</sup> See: Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2004), Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2: *Lifeworld and System – The Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1987) or Habermas, J. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> See: Kant, I. 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose'.

<sup>68</sup> See: Marx, K. *Capital*, vol. 1.

of new mechanisms of domination based on bureaucratic and technical systems of social management.<sup>69</sup> As such, all three authors' grand narratives are attuned to provide, on the one hand, an explanatory understanding of the development of the human powers of control and how of these have been accompanied by the dialectical development of new forms of domination and relations of power between people and, on the other hand, an anticipatory assessment of the immanent potential that has been gathered throughout history for the further expansion of human beings' control over their conditions of existence in a more conscious and self-reflexive manner that avoids the dialectical emergence of new forms of domination.

This theme finds resonance in Elias's process sociology and in his argument about how the human capacity for control not only constitutes a defining feature of the species' history but also one of the goals of social scientific research. In this context, Elias introduces a concept which makes it possible to address with greater clarity the treatment of this theme not only in his own work, but also in that of the critical authors. When considering the development of the human powers of control in a very long-term perspective, Elias argues that a 'triad of basic controls' can be identified as fundamental for human existence on the planet.<sup>70</sup> These three types of control constitute what Elias classifies as universal social processes, insofar as all human groups have to engage, to some extent, in the exercise of these three forms of control in order to ensure their continued survival.<sup>71</sup> The triad entails: 1) control over non-human external nature; in the sense of the capacity to direct natural processes to human ends, to tame other animal species, and to labour nature into a human-made world of objects for the satisfaction of human needs. 2) control of each individual over his or her own internal drives and impulses; in the sense of self-control over internal human nature and the more animalic desires and inclinations towards sexuality, aggressiveness or domination without which social life would be impossible. And 3) control over the networks of social interdependence; in the sense of the production of social frameworks and norms that regulate intra- and inter-group relations and define what are acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour between people.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Elias, N. *What is Sociology?*, p. 151.

<sup>71</sup> Elias, N. *What is Sociology?*, p. 151.

<sup>72</sup> Elias, N. *What is Sociology?*, p. 151.

These three types of control are understood to constitute unavoidable aspects of the specifically human mode of life. Every human child has to learn how to tame his or her internal animalic impulses, and to carry on self-controlling his or her drives into adulthood, in order to be able to live in society with other human beings. Every human society has to continuously engage in productive activity vis-à-vis human nature in order to destroy or tame threats from other animal species and natural phenomena, as well as produce the products required for the satisfaction of human needs. And every human society needs to constantly negotiate rules of social conduct through which it defines social roles and relations of power, maintains internal social pacification, and ensures collective defence against external enemies and aggressors. As such, whether or not to exercise control in these three dimensions of human existence – i.e. over self, over nature and over society – is not an option which is opened up to human beings, as the very existence of the human mode of life depends on it. If at all, human beings have the possibility to make collective decisions regarding how these types of control are exercised, but only in accordance with the spectrum of options that might be opened up in particular historical contexts and in accordance with the previous development of the human powers of control.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, the triad of controls can be understood as expressing universal social processes that serve a framing device for analyses concerning the long-term development of the species which intend to function as a means of orientation that help people both understand their conditions of existence and control their future development. As Elias observes, ‘control of nature, social control and self-control form a kind of chain ring; they form a triangle of interconnected functions that can serve as a basic pattern for the observation of human affairs’.<sup>74</sup> A conception supported by Cas Wouters who argues that Elias’s concept of the triad of basic controls offers a wide scope for studying connections between technological developments, developments in social organisation, and in self-

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<sup>73</sup> We are thankful to Andrew Linklater for making this argument regarding the inevitability of the exercise of control in these three dimensions of human existence and highlighting how the triad of controls can serve as a universal orientating concept for the observation of the human condition and the long-term process of the species’ development. These comments were made by Linklater during his presentation ‘Process Sociology and World History: considering the ‘problem of harm’ in long-term perspective’ at the conference ‘From the Past to the Present and towards Possible Futures: The Collected Works of Norbert Elias’, in the University of Leicester, Leicester, between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Elias, N. ‘Technisation and civilisation’ in *Essays II: On Civilising Processes, State Formation and National Identity* [Collected Works, vol. 15] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2008), p. 126.

control throughout the history of the species.<sup>75</sup> The notion of triad of controls is thus applied throughout this study to our reading of the works of Kant, Marx, Habermas and Elias as a way to draw out the connections between these three types of control in these authors' analyses of the long-term process of development of the human species. It makes it easier to highlight their thoughts regarding the dialectical character of human development and how the expansion of some types of control is connected with unplanned contradictions and the emergence of new forms of domination associated with other types of control.

Furthermore, throughout this study we connect our analysis of the triad of controls in each of the chosen authors' work with the already addressed notion of involvement–detachment balance. This permits us to trace to what extent each of these authors' grand narratives has been able to provide a more detached, comprehensive and encompassing analysis of the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of controls throughout the species' development and how it has informed their anticipatory assessment of the prospects for the future development of human self-determination. For example, we note how Marx's over-involvement with the economic struggles of his own time period led him to place human productive activity and control over nature as the main cause of the historical development of the species, and to conceive of the socialisation of the means of production as the key to human emancipation, to the detriment of an analysis of the role of self-control or control over social processes in this process, e.g. in the form of the development of social norms. On the other hand, we show how Habermas achieves a greater degree of detachment in his grand narrative than Marx, which enables him to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the role of the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of controls in human development. However, we also note that, when compared with Elias's grand narrative, Habermas still remains locked in a more involved perspective which frames his account of the development of the human powers of control in a linear and teleological model of human development and that understands Western modernity as the culmination of that process. Elias's more detached approach instead proposes a multi-linear and open-ended model of the species' history capable of tracing the developmental dynamics that influence the development of the human capacity for control in different directions throughout history. At the same time, we also argue that

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<sup>75</sup> Wouters, C. 'Universally applicable criteria for doing figurational process sociology: Seven balances, one triad', *Human Figurations: Long-term perspectives on the human condition*, 3: 1 (2014).

Elias's more detached approach to the study of the triad of controls in the species' history comes at the cost of a postponement of an anticipatory assessment of how the human powers of control might be developed in a more conscious manner, which informs political agency envisioning an expansion of human beings' self-determination over their conditions of existence. This observations leads us, in chapter seven, to consider what types of secondary re-involvement are implied in Elias's more detached grand narrative and what these tell us about the immanent potential gathered by the long-term history of the species for the more self-reflexive development of the human powers of control in a manner that both expands human self-determination and avoids the dialectical emergence of new forms of domination.

As we argue throughout our study, the connection between the notion of control and more involved or detached approaches to grand narratives on human development in these authors' works is particularly evident in their respective uses of the concept of 'civilisation'. All of the authors under analysis link their respective conceptions of civilisation with the development of the human powers of control and, in particular, with those types of control that their more involved or detached perspectives on human development consider predominant in the constitution of the conditions of human existence. As such, to recover the example given above, while Marx more involved approach identifies civilisation with the historical development of human technological control over non-human nature<sup>76</sup>, Habermas links the notion of civilisation with the establishment of democratic forms of control over the state's monopoly of the technological and social means of violence.<sup>77</sup> Different conceptions of civilisation are thus mentioned throughout this study, but only insofar as these assume a role in our reading of these authors' grand narratives as different answer to the problem of orientation.

By engaging in a discussion of civilisation, we also participate in the renewed interest in this topic in International Relations where, especially since the publication of Samuel Huntington's thesis about the 'clash of civilisations', several authors addressed the meaning

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<sup>76</sup> See: Marx, K. and Engels, F. 'The Communist Manifesto' *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, edited by David McLellan (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 245-272 and Marx, K. *Grundrisse* (London, Penguin Books, 1993).

<sup>77</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012).

of civilisation and the importance of the concept for the study of world politics.<sup>78</sup> Amongst them, particular highlight can be made of the works of Peter Katzenstein<sup>79</sup>, Cox<sup>80</sup>, Brett Bowden<sup>81</sup>, Linklater<sup>82</sup> and Hobson and Patrick Jackson.<sup>83</sup> In critical international theory, Cox since the mid-1990s, and Linklater since the early 2000s, have been the major contributors for the recovery of the study of civilisation.<sup>84</sup> In Cox's assessment, civilisation is a fluid and imprecise concept.<sup>85</sup> When used in the singular, it usually acquires an 'exclusive and hierarchical meaning' based on the distinction between the 'civilised' and the 'uncivilised' or 'barbaric'.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, when used in the plural, it possesses a pluralistic and inclusive meaning, implying that 'there are different ways of becoming civilised'.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, one can think about civilisation as either representing a 'fixed essence' shared by a group of people, and which permits to characterise them as belonging to the same civilisation – e.g. Western, Islamic or Chinese – or as representing a process which implies a continually changing combination of social forces and ideas.<sup>88</sup> This later perspective corresponds to a discussion of the concept in the plural, where the emphasis is in identifying and characterising ongoing civilising processes taking place within and between different human groups.<sup>89</sup> Such has been the perspective which has become predominant in IR

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<sup>78</sup> See: Huntington, S. *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>79</sup> Katzenstein, P. (ed.) *Sinicization and the Rise of China: Civilisational Processes Beyond East and West* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2012); Katzenstein, P. (ed.) *Civilisations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2010).

<sup>80</sup> Cox, R. and Schechter, M. *The Political Economy of a Plural World: Critical Reflections on Power, Morals and Civilisation* (New York, Routledge, 2002); Cox, R. 'Thinking about civilisations', *Review of International Studies*, 26 (2000) pp. 217-234.

<sup>81</sup> Bowden, B. (ed.) *Civilisation: Critical Concepts in Political Science 4 vols.* (London, Routledge, 2009); Bowden, B. 'The River of Inter-Civilisational Relations: The Ebb and Flow of Peoples, Ideas and Innovations', *Third World Quarterly*, 28: 7 (2007) pp. 1359-1374.

<sup>82</sup> Linklater, A. 'The Global Civilising Role of Cosmopolitanism' in *The Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitan Studies*, edited by Gerard Delanty (Abingdon, Routledge, 2012), pp. 60-71; Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*.

<sup>83</sup> Jackson, P. 'How to Think About Civilisations' in *Civilisations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives*, pp. 176-200; Jackson, P. and Hall, M. (ed.) *Civilisational Identity: The Production and Reproduction of 'Civilisations' in International Relations*, (Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2007).

<sup>84</sup> Cox, R. 'Civilisations in World Political Economy' *New Political Economy*, 1: 2 (1996) pp. 141-156 and Linklater, A. 'Norbert Elias, 'The Civilising Process' and International Relations', *International Politics*, 41: 1 (2004) pp. 3-35.

<sup>85</sup> Cox, R. and Schechter, M. *The Political Economy of a Plural World*, p. 142.

<sup>86</sup> Cox, R. and Schechter, M. *The Political Economy of a Plural World*, p. 142.

<sup>87</sup> Cox, R. and Schechter, M. *The Political Economy of a Plural World*, p. 142.

<sup>88</sup> Cox, R. and Schechter, M. *The Political Economy of a Plural World*, p. 143.

<sup>89</sup> Cox, R. and Schechter, M. *The Political Economy of a Plural World*, p. 143.



studies on civilisation, many of which have developed significant efforts to escape the non-processual, fixed and essentialist understanding of the concept.

Linklater shares Cox's emphasis on a plurality of civilising processes, although he highlights to a greater extent than Cox the connection between civilisation and the human capacity for control which is established by the critical authors and Elias's process sociology and which will be the focus of our treatment of the concept throughout this study. In particular, Linklater defends what in chapter six we identify as the more detached Elasian conception of civilisation, which understands the concept as expressing a universal social process that all human beings have to undergo, and which consists in their learning how to control their animalic needs and biological impulses, as a condition for the sustainability and the continued survival of their societies.<sup>90</sup> As Linklater notes, according to Elias, human social existence depends on people's capacity to 'internalize', from an early age, 'modes of self-regulation' regarding basic drives such as anger, aggressive behaviour and violence, which make life amongst others possible.<sup>91</sup> As such, to Elias's detached conception of civilisation – which links it with the dimension of the triad of basic controls concerning people's self-control over their drives and impulses – there is no 'zero point' in civilisation, no society that exists in a pure state of barbarism and then initiates a civilising process, since all human beings have to learn, since early childhood, patterns of civilised self-control in order to be able to live in society. Hence, there can be no human society which does not undergo a civilising process and that does not define some form of pattern of civilised self-control at the level of its members' personality structures.<sup>92</sup> Civilisation cannot thus be understood as a fixed characteristic of some human groups but instead must always be

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<sup>90</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 159. Linklater argues that Freudian themes are evident throughout Elias's work on the connection between the self-control of animalic drives and the development of civilisation. As Linklater notes, like Freud, Elias considers that civilisation generates its own 'distinctive pathologies', as the conflicts between people driven by animalic impulses are progressively 'moved within' in the form of a struggle between internal drives and an increasingly 'civilised' super-ego.

<sup>91</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 159. In this context, Linklater also notes a connection between conceptions of civilisation and 'civilised' behaviour and attitudes towards violence. His argument is that people's self-definition as 'civilised', and their own self-distinction from those they characterise as 'barbaric', involves particular attitudes towards what are considered acceptable manifestations of violent behaviour and frequently entails a lowering of shame and repugnance thresholds associated with the practice or the witnessing of violence upon other people. See: Linklater, A. 'Torture and Civilisation', *International Relations*, 21: 1 (2007) pp. 111-118; Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics* and Linklater, A. *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States-System*.

<sup>92</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 159.

perceived as an 'unfinished product of very long-term patterns of change that are constantly evolving, and which never escape the possibility of sudden reversal'.<sup>93</sup>

To Elias, civilisation is a social process which is universal to the human species – insofar as all human groups need to constantly develop and negotiate historically changeable social patterns of individual self-control in order to maintain themselves as viable societies. At the same time, Elias argues that there are traceable developmental dynamics that influence the development of civilisation in different, society-specific, ways throughout the history of the species.<sup>94</sup> As such, Elias's more detached linkage between civilisation and the development of the human powers of self-control shows how the concept can be approached in a manner that, simultaneously, recognises it as a universal feature of human existence and identifies the immense variety of ways of being 'civilised'. Underlying such conception is a denial of evaluative and essentialist conceptions of civilisation that consider some human groups to be 'civilised' while other lack civilisation altogether. This approach is combined with the defence of the possibility of developing non-evaluative and comparative studies of different civilising processes and their expression in different ways of life in the context of a multi-linear and open-ended grand narrative on human development that traces the development and the global interweaving of society-specific civilising processes throughout the species' history.<sup>95</sup> As we argue in chapter six, this constitutes a more detached approach to grand narratives on human development which permits their recovery as more adequate means of orientation that help human beings better understand their long-term history and the constitution of their conditions of existence. Furthermore, it safeguards against the shortcomings of more involved and

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<sup>93</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 160. In this manner, Linklater underlines the distinction implied in Elias's work between what Stephen Mennell characterises as an 'emic' and an 'etic' conception of civilisation. Following Mennell, we can argue that an emic point of view refers to the fixed and essentialist conception of civilisation, and expresses how native members of a social group perceive themselves as 'civilised' and categorise, evaluate and relate to the world and other social groups accordingly. It expresses an insider's and more involved perspective, focused on understanding the features, meaning, and feelings that particular social groups attach to the idea of civilisation and their own self-images as 'civilised'. On the other hand, an etic point of view expresses an outsider's perspective and is rather focused on providing a detached, non-evaluative and 'scientific' analysis of civilisation as a multi-linear and open-ended process which can assume different forms, and which human societies undergo as a condition for their continued survival. As Mennell notes, Elias's analysis of civilisation entails the development of an etic perspective of the concept that contributes to a more detached, non-evaluative and technical understanding of civilisation as involving long-term, inter-generational, unplanned and unintended processes of change in the patterning of people's self-control. See: Mennell, S. 'Civilising offensives and decivilising processes: between the emic and the etic', *Human Figurations: Long-term perspectives on the human condition*, 4: 1 (2015).

<sup>94</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 159.

<sup>95</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 160.

particularistic grand narratives on human development which differentiate human groups according to a developmental ladder that inherently characterises some as more 'civilised' than others in a manner that serves predominantly to fulfil self-congratulatory feelings of superiority of the self-defined 'civilised'. These more involved approaches are recognised in this study as inadequate means of orientation to the extent that they undermine the capacity of human beings caught up in global networks of interdependence – constituted by the global interweaving of different society-specific civilising and developmental processes – to either understand the plurality of the human condition or to devise modes of political agency that mediate between this plurality and that enable the collaborative development – between the different sections of humankind – of global institutions envisioning the collective expansion of human being's more conscious and self-reflexive control over their conditions of existence.

### **Conclusion**

The five concepts 'orientation', 'cosmopolitanism', 'grand narratives', 'involvement–detachment balance' and 'triad of controls' frame our inquiry into the problem of orientation through a reinterpretation of the classical works of the critical authors Kant, Marx and Habermas, and of the process sociologist Elias. In particular, we are concerned with addressing the possibility of recovering very long-term perspectives on human development in critical international theory as a way to develop more cosmopolitan means of orientation regarding the conditions of global interdependence of the human species. In this context, it is important to notice that, when addressing the problem of orientation and the role of grand narratives in its context, this study does not intend to consider the works of these different authors in isolation. Rather, it tries to trace the development of their respective approaches in a manner that highlights their interconnections and how each of these authors can be considered part of a long inter-generational chain of knowledge production throughout which they try to wrestle with the problem of orientation.

The following chapters reflect this idea of an inter-generational dialogue and highlight how the relation between the works of each of these authors cannot be understood as establishing a linear process of knowledge accumulation. Rather, it is better characterized as a dialectical movement that is itself full of contradictions and tragic losses.

Hence, while each of these authors strives to preserve and integrate in his own theoretical framework the main insights of his predecessors and overcome what he perceives as their respective shortcomings, each of them also loses sight of some of their predecessors most important insights, while advancing positions and perspectives which, from an even later perspective, come to be found problematic and less representative of a cosmopolitan perspective than they intended. With this dialectical movement in mind, we can begin our study in earnest.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Immanuel Kant**

### **History and Idea**

In this chapter we interpret the work of Immanuel Kant from the perspective of our engagement with the problem of orientation as an attempt to provide an answer to both its explanatory and anticipatory dimensions. Our main argument is that Kant's work highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the connection between the dimensions of the triad of controls related to self-control and control over social processes, as well as the orientating role of grand narratives which provide a more cosmopolitan perspective on the conditions of existence of globalised humanity. However, we also argue that Kant's critical approach exhibits some of the main difficulties that can be found in the development of more adequate means of orientation. In particular, it shows how grand narratives which rely on a linear and teleological conception of human development and on a transcendental ascertainment of the ideal conditions of human freedom are inadequate as orientating frameworks to the extent that they inherently reproduce forms of modernist myth regarding the history of the species which legitimize practices of exclusion and domination between different parts of humanity.

The chapter is organized in five main sections. In the first two sections we read Kant's work as providing a transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation. First, we discuss Kant's conception of human beings' fundamental and defining capacity for self-determination and his transcendental argument regarding the *a priori* preconditions of human freedom. And second, we interpret Kant's assessment of those preconditions as a transcendental normative standpoint of orientation, which helps people understand the ideal social conditions which the patterns of human global interdependence need to reproduce in order to enable the full expression of their capacity for self-determination.

Then, in the third section, we move to an interpretation of Kant's work that addresses the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation. We consider Kant's philosophy of history as an abstraction from the actual course of human events which

intends to capture the structure of human historical development and provide a more adequate understanding of the main dynamics and social processes shaping the history of the species.

In fourth section, we address how Kant can be seen to connect these two dimensions of the problem of orientation through his proposal for perpetual peace and the triple constitutionalization of world politics, which orientates human beings as to how, on the basis of the immanent potential gathered by the long-term process of human development, they might come to exercise a greater degree of conscious and collective control over their conditions of existence and thus approximate the ideal transcendental conditions of freedom.

Finally, in section five, we discuss how Kant's work points to the limitations of means of orientation based on a transcendental, linear and teleological conception of human development. Here, we argue that Kant's critical approach produces a form of modernist theorising about the human condition which, under the cover of its supposed cosmopolitanism, blocks the awareness, and compromises the legitimacy, of alternative paths of human development which do not follow its linear model. Consequently, Kant's critical approach is unable to achieve the degree of detachment which is required for a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation.

### **1. Rational natural beings**

In this section, we discuss Kant's conception of human beings as a species with a unique and defining capacity for freedom as the basis of a Kantian engagement with the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation. In *'Critique of Practical Reason'*, Kant observes that human beings have a capacity for reason and for the self-determination of their will which, however, is accompanied by the constant lure of their more animalic internal inclinations, which draw people to the satisfaction of their impulses and desires frequently against their own rational will.<sup>96</sup> In Kant's view, freedom is not to be found in the satisfaction of these internal inclinations since individuals driven in their behaviour purely by

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<sup>96</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*.

their desires express ‘nothing but the heteronomy of the will’.<sup>97</sup> It makes no sense to talk of freedom if the human subject is determined by empirical inclinations and his or her behaviour is a product of these desires and wants.<sup>98</sup> Instead, the very possibility of freedom has to be grounded in a conception of the will abstracted from empirical and animalic inclinations. An action must be considered free according not to the purpose which it seeks to attain, but by the maxim which determines it. Therefore, freedom ‘does not depend on the realization of the object of the action, but merely on the principle of volition by which the action has taken place, without regard to any object of desire’.<sup>99</sup>

According to Kant, a totally free will is thus that which is wholly abstracted from empirical considerations, i.e. which is driven purely by a form of volition absolutely disconnected from any particular wants, desires or inclinations.<sup>100</sup> Such abstraction can only be attained by the operation of reason, the faculty through which subjects distance themselves from their immediate empirical circumstances and their contextually or internally driven inclinations, and will their behaviour according to self-determined and conscious volition. However, Kant also notes that such condition of absolute rationality is outside the grasp of human beings; an argument he reinforces by posing the theoretical existence of completely pure rational beings, a category from which humans are excluded.<sup>101</sup> According to Kant, the will of pure rational beings is shaped exclusively by the

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<sup>97</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 63.

<sup>98</sup> It is important to highlight the problem of gendered language in Kant’s writings. As Pauline Kleingeld remarks, Kant views women as inferior to men because he considers them less capable of the use of reason, hence justifying women’s lack of active citizenship in his political philosophy. It is not enough, Kleingeld argues, to use inclusive language to overcome this problem as the majority of Kantian scholarship does. Instead a full study of the role of gender in Kant’s work is required to understand how to deal with this problematic. However, such a study is not the purpose of the present inquiry. Consequently, in this context, the position Kant himself adopts in his moral philosophy, in which he abstracts from differences of gender, class or race and is concerned with the universality of beings capable of reason is considered the frame of reference to analyse Kant’s critical theory. From this perspective then, the use of inclusive language in order to overcome Kant’s gendered perspective appears as a legitimate approach. For more on Kant and gender see Kleingeld, P. ‘The Problematic Status of Gender-Neutral Language in the History of Philosophy: The Case of Kant’, *Philosophical Forum*, 25: 2 (1993) pp. 134-150.

<sup>99</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 16.

<sup>100</sup> As Allison argues, to Kant, freedom is an ‘uncaused cause’, i.e. an agency capable of making an absolute beginning, and of being a ‘spontaneous initiator’ of causal chains through choice. See: Allison, H. ‘Kant on Freedom of the Will’, *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Paul Guyer (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006). See also: Allison, H. *Kant’s Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Guyer, P. *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>101</sup> We are indebted to the work of Andrew Linklater for opening up the argumentative avenue based on the distinction between rational beings and human beings. See: Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*; It is important to note that the category of pure rational beings is a rationally inferred

operation of reason, without receiving any 'bias from any other quarter with respect to its judgements'.<sup>102</sup> Humans, on the other hand, are also natural beings and, as a consequence, such pure abstraction from their more animalic inclinations lies beyond their grasp. However, the fact that within human animals also lurks the spark of rationality, which can be developed throughout the lives of individuals and across different generations if the social and natural conditions conducive to the use of reason are gathered means that, unlike other animals, human beings are not condemned to be simply the slaves of their inclinations. Hence, a fundamental and defining feature of humanity, in Kant's view, is the capacity for the development of the use of reason, and for the attainment of a greater degree of self-determination in relation to their animalic impulses, a characteristic that lies at the core of the distinction between humans and other animals. In this context, Kant observes that when choice is 'determined by pure reason it is called free choice; [while] that which is determined only by inclination (...) is animal choice'.<sup>103</sup> In the case of human beings, their capacity for choice can be 'affected but not determined by impulses, and is therefore of itself not pure but can still be determined to actions by pure will'.<sup>104</sup>

Kant's observations regarding the human capacity for rational self-determination on the one hand, and the constant lure of animalic inclinations on the other, can be interpreted as providing the basis for an attempted answer to the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation. They point to the possibility of human beings attaining a greater degree of conscious control over their conditions of existence by exercising a more self-determined and rational will which detaches itself from individual internal desires and inclinations and thus diminishes their determining power over people's behaviour. From this perspective, Kant's conception of freedom can also be understood to entail the argument that a free and rational will must also be one which expresses a cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition, given how it cannot suffer from any distortion whatsoever by particular inclinations.<sup>105</sup> Kant's categorical imperative, by stating that the will of a rational subject is only free if he or she can also will that his or her maxim of action should become a universal law, can thus be read as establishing a normative standpoint of orientation

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category in Kant's conceptual and philosophical scheme, within which Kant places beings whose empirical existence cannot be verified, such as angels or daemon.

<sup>102</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 67.

<sup>103</sup> Kant, I. *Metaphysics of Morals*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 42.

<sup>104</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 67.

<sup>105</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 17.



regarding the preconditions of human freedom; it points to the fact that a free will is one that expresses a universal perspective that does not receive any empirical or particularistic bias.<sup>106</sup> In this manner, Kant highlights the inherent connection between individual freedom and the attainment of a more detached and cosmopolitan perspective which allows people to orientate themselves to each other and to the idea of humanity and thus overcome the particularistic points of views associated with their personal and more immediate inclinations and desires, as well as their more parochial and ethnocentric attachments to self-regarding political communities.<sup>107</sup>

Furthermore, Kant's work also underlines how a more cosmopolitan perspective not only constitutes a condition for the freedom of the will but also implies a set of moral principles that must regulate human social relations if human beings are to bring their conditions of existence under greater conscious control. It is Kant's argument that, if a free will is not to be subject to particularistic inclinations, no being with a capacity for freedom can ever become merely the means, i.e. the object, for the fulfilment of the ends of another being. If it were otherwise, then not only the one which is used as a means would not be free – because he or she would be subject to the particular ends of another – but also the one which makes the use would act under the compulsion of particularistic interests and inclinations. The freedom of the will thus requires, as a precondition for its existence, that every being with a capacity for reason be treated always as an end and never merely as a means.<sup>108</sup> Kant classifies this maxim as a fundamental moral law that must orientate human behaviour and which implies that all human beings share an equal and inherent dignity, which 'raises them above all other beings in the world'.<sup>109</sup> To Kant 'a free will and a will subject to moral laws are one and the same'.<sup>110</sup> Morality is understood as the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will and a matter of freedom rather than good or bad.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 17.

<sup>107</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 49.

<sup>108</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 47.

<sup>109</sup> Kant, I. *Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 255; According to Louis Dupre, Kant's account of the fundamental dignity of humanity means that the 'moral obligation' to respect persons as absolute ends applies to all humans, whether primitive or cultured, educated or uneducated, criminal or moral since their absolute worth depends not on cultural or moral achievements, but on the moral and rational capacities of the species. See: Dupre, L. 'Kant's Theory of History and Progress', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 51: 4 (1998) p. 820. See also: Sensen, O. *Kant on Human Dignity* (Boston, Walter de Gruyter, 2011).

<sup>110</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 66. For more on the foundation of Kant's moral philosophy in the notion of freedom see: Weinrib, E. 'Law as Idea of Reason' in *Essays on Kant's Political Philosophy*, edited by Howard Williams (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1992); Guyer, P. *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*

In this context, Kant's idea of the kingdom of ends, which establishes the set of ideal social conditions in which the moral law inherent in the human capacity for freedom could be actualised, can be interpreted as establishing a transcendental standpoint of normative orientation that serves as an orientating device to human beings regarding how they might further expand their capacity for self-determination and exercise a greater degree of conscious control over their empirical and historical conditions of existence. As we argue in the next section, Kant's idea of the kingdom of ends embodies an ideal and transcendental – in the sense of *a priori* – model of how human beings can attain a truly cosmopolitan condition which enables them to achieve a higher degree of detachment from their particular inclinations and thus ameliorate the determining and frequently destructive effects that these have on their social relations.

## 2. The kingdom of ends

In the previous section, we addressed how Kant's conception of human beings as rational natural beings can be interpreted as the basis of a Kantian answer to the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation. In this section, we further develop this argument by considering how Kant's analysis of the transcendental preconditions of freedom leads him to the idea of the kingdom of ends, which expresses the organising principles that the patterns of human interdependence and social relations need to respect in order to achieve a truly cosmopolitan condition and fully actualise the human powers of self-determination. The transcendental idea of the kingdom of ends can thus be understood to fulfil an orientating function helping people find their bearings when inquiring about how they might achieve a greater degree of control over their shared existence on the planet.

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(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993); Wood, A. *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>111</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 58 As Howard Williams observes, Kant considers that in so far as humans are rational beings, they consciously determine their actions and have the capacity to behave morally, but in so far as they are subject to their natural needs and desires, they are capable of behaving immorally. See: Williams, H. *Kant's Political Philosophy* (Oxford, Blackwell Publisher, 1983), p. 1. In this context, Linklater argues that by acting in accordance with moral principles prescribed by their own reason, humans assert their independence from the natural world and establish their uniquely human characteristic and non-natural being, i.e. their freedom. Purely natural beings are 'condemned' to behave instinctively while 'humanity unfolds' as human beings tame their animal inclinations and act freely, out of respect for those moral principles inherent in their rational nature. See: Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 99.

In *'Critique of Practical Reason'*, Kant describes the idea of the kingdom of ends as an ideal union of rational beings under a common system of laws that ensures that each of its members treats itself and all the others never merely as means, but always also as ends in themselves.<sup>112</sup> Under this common law the autonomy of each individual rational being is guaranteed by the fact that each is both a sovereign and a subject of the law. Although subject to the law, this law is the same as that which the subject would rationally give to him or herself as the inherent law of freedom; consequently, they are subject to the will of no other but their own, and subject only to the very law which is constitutive of their freedom. Kant's ideal constitution is thus a universally accepted law because it embodies the preconditions of free will.<sup>113</sup>

In Kant's assessment, in order for such a universal system of law to be effective and promote the freedom, reason and morality of every human being on the planet, it must encompass the whole species and be embodied in a truly cosmopolitan form of political and social organisation.<sup>114</sup> As he observes in *'Perpetual Peace'* although a state organized according to a moral civil constitution may gather the internal conditions for the attainment of freedom, when considered in its external relations with other states, each state appears in the same condition 'as individual men living in a state of nature, independent of external laws'.<sup>115</sup> The lack of legal regulation of world politics is thus a constant threat to freedom, given the uncontrolled dynamics of the states-system and its perpetual condition of potential war that might drag people into patterns of interdependence and mutual interaction that are not controlled or intended by any of them and which undermine their capacity to live autonomously, behave according to a rational, free and moral will, and treat each other as ends and not only as means. All the more so when, because of the historical lengthening and increased interconnection of the webs of human interdependence, events

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<sup>112</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 51.

<sup>113</sup> As Paul Guyer notes, when following the categorical imperative, an agent is not merely acting in compliance with universalisable maxims but conceiving of him or herself as a 'universal legislator' and thus as the source of these maxims, which characterises the 'interest' human beings have in acting on the basis of the categorical imperative. See: Guyer, P. 'The Possibility of the Categorical Imperative' *The Philosophical Review*, 104: 3 (1995) p. 380. Furthermore, according to Linklater, Kant's conception of the kingdom of ends retains Rousseau's 'endorsement of the inalienable sovereignty of the people since it implies that rational beings only obey the laws they make themselves'. See: Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 103. For more on the influence of Rousseau on Kant see: Kelly, G. 'Rousseau, Kant and History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 29: 3 (1968) pp. 347-364; Knippenberg, J. 'Moving Beyond Fear: Rousseau and Kant on Cosmopolitan Education', *The Journal of Politics*, 51: 4 (1989) pp. 809-827.

<sup>114</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 51.

<sup>115</sup> Kant, I. *'Perpetual Peace'*, p. 102

and decisions in one place or country, have come to reverberate throughout the whole Earth, affecting countless individuals in unplanned ways. As Kant observes ‘the peoples of the Earth have entered in varying degrees into a universal community, (...) to the point where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere’.<sup>116</sup> This condition of global interdependence of the species has to be matched by a cosmopolitan political organisation which not only enables the regulation of human interdependence on the basis of common laws but also promotes, at the individual level, a greater detachment of people’s perspectives in a manner that overcomes their parochial and particularistic points of view and orientates them to the reality of their shared existence on the planet.<sup>117</sup>

In this context, Kant argues that if one attains a more cosmopolitan perspective on the conditions of existence of human beings it becomes obvious that human freedom and morality require that all individuals and societies ‘who can at all influence one another must adhere to some kind of constitution’.<sup>118</sup> The discussion of this argument in ‘*Perpetual Peace*’ leads to Kant conceiving of the necessity of three levels of common law amongst interdependent societies: first, a constitution based on the ‘civil right’ of individuals within a nation (*ius civitatis*); second, a constitution based on the ‘international right’ of states in their relations with one another (*ius gentium*); and third, a constitution based on ‘cosmopolitan right’, which, structured around the idea of world citizenship, regulates the relations between individuals and states on the basis of inalienable rights common to all beings capable of reason, freedom and morality (*ius cosmopolitanum*).<sup>119</sup> All three levels of constitutionalization are required because ‘if the principle of outer freedom limited by law is lacking in any one of these three possible forms of rightful condition, the framework of all the others is unavoidably undermined and must finally collapse’.<sup>120</sup> As such, not only every being with a capacity for reason must be a member of a state under common laws but also each of these states ‘can and ought to demand of the others that they should enter along

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<sup>116</sup> Kant, I. ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 108.

<sup>117</sup> According to Kleingeld, since the world has already developed to a point in which there is interaction on a global scale, one can no longer ‘refuse to think’ how such interaction should be structured to satisfy the demands of justice. See: Kleingeld, P. *Kant and Cosmopolitanism: The Philosophical Ideal of World-Citizenship*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 39.

<sup>118</sup> Kant, I. ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 98.

<sup>119</sup> Kant, I. ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 98.

<sup>120</sup> Kant, I. ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 98.

with it into a constitution, similar to the civil one, within which the rights of each could be secured'.<sup>121</sup>

Kant's idea of the kingdom of ends thus implies the rational need for a cosmopolitan federation of free states, which integrates all human societies on the planet and regulates world politics, since only in a universal association of states can rights come to hold 'conclusively' and a 'true condition of peace' come about.<sup>122</sup> The transcendental model of a cosmopolitan federation 'in which every state, even the smallest, could expect to derive its security and rights not from its own power and its own legal judgement, but solely from this great federation, from a united power and the law-governed decisions of a united will' is thus a rationally necessary conclusion to the investigation of the preconditions of human freedom.<sup>123</sup>

However, Kant's conception of human beings as rational natural beings also leads him to recognise that human have not yet achieved the degree of detachment from their more parochial points of view and particular inclinations and desires which enables them to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition and recognise the rational need for a world federation. As Kant observes, the ideal of a cosmopolitan polity is not yet 'the will of the nations, according to their present conception of international right, so that they reject *in hypothesi* what is true *in thesi*'.<sup>124</sup> From the perspective of our inquiry, Kant's idea of a kingdom of ends and its embodiment in the transcendental model of a cosmopolitan federation can be interpreted as a transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation. It establishes a transcendental normative standpoint of orientation which guides human beings as to under what conditions they can bring the social processes in which they are enmeshed under greater control and thus further expand their defining capacity for freedom. Furthermore, as we see in the next section, Kant's writings on the long-term process of human development can also be interpreted as posing an answer to the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation. In particular, they can be read as not only tracing the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping the long-term history of the species – and thus providing orientation to human beings regarding how they might better understand themselves and

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<sup>121</sup> Kant, I. 'Perpetual Peace', p. 102.

<sup>122</sup> Kant, I. 'Perpetual Peace', p. 156.

<sup>123</sup> Kant, I. 'Idea for a Universal History with A Cosmopolitan Purpose', p. 47.

<sup>124</sup> Kant, I. 'Perpetual Peace', p. 105.

their conditions of existence – but they also trace the immanent potential which has been gathered for the further approximation of the condition of existence of globalised humanity to the kingdom of ends. This reading of Kant's work leads us to address, in section four, how Kant's proposal for a League of Nations brings these two dimensions of the problem of orientation together.

### 3. History as a rational process

In this section, we read Kant's writings on human historical development as an answer to the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation. We show how this answer comes in the form not of an analysis of empirical world history, but rather of a philosophy of history which tries to ascertain the universal structure of the long-term development of the species. With this approach, Kant can be said to seek for a more detached engagement with human historical development which provides a better understanding of the rational meaning underlying the apparently irrational course of human history and traces, underneath the chaos of historical events, the structured development of humanity's capacity for reason. As such, Kant's philosophy of history is here understood as an approach to the explanatory dimension of orientation which consists in the production of a theoretical interpretation of human development as if it manifests a structured development which permits a more cosmopolitan perspective on the universal dynamics and social processes conditioning human existence across space and time.

In works such as *'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose'*, *'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History'* or *'Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View'* Kant observes that the human capacity for reason and for the ascertainment of the transcendental preconditions of freedom changes historically.<sup>125</sup> In this context, he proposes that throughout human development, people progressively become more rational, better able to tame their more animalic impulses, and of developing more cosmopolitan and less involved perspectives which recognise the moral law inherent in their

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<sup>125</sup> Gunnar Beck considers that Kant does not think humans inherently possess knowledge of the moral law, but only a 'primitive natural capacity for moral discrimination'. Actual morality is historically attained 'with time', by establishing a 'way of thinking based on the development of reason, culture and art' that guarantees a 'continued process of enlightenment'. See: Beck, G. 'Immanuel Kant's Theory of Right', *Ratio Juris*, 19: 4 (2006) pp. 371-401.

own capacity for freedom. Kant develops this position by building a philosophical account of the species' history which can be interpreted as striving to capture the dynamics shaping the human transition from a past condition of animality – in which humans were predominantly determined by their inclinations – to a potential future of rationality in which they will orientate their behaviour and principles of volition predominantly in a self-determined manner. The Kantian understanding of human historical development is thus teleological, in the sense that it follows an ordered pattern of development with a specific direction and towards a pre-determined outcome.

However, Kant also notes that it is not possible to prove this teleological movement through an analysis of empirical history. The teleological character of his historical account thus should not be taken literally, as describing the actual process of world history, but must instead be understood as serving two main purposes. On the one hand, it constitutes a way of navigating through the apparently chaotic history of the species, so that it can be intelligibly organized in a way that highlights the ordered character of the progressive improvement of human reason. On the other hand, Kant argues that his teleological account of the species' history serves a moral purpose. It does so to the extent that it helps human beings achieve a more cosmopolitan perspective on their conditions of existence, guided by the belief that, despite human failings and historical mistakes, the species as a whole moves inexorably towards a future condition of freedom, morality and universal expansion of human sympathy across borders and all forms of particularistic interests and conflicts.<sup>126</sup> Such belief can, in Kant's view, support decision-makers and people in a position to influence history to adopt a more universal perspective and never give up, despite the odds,

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<sup>126</sup> As Howard Williams notes, Kant does not assume that such teleology can be taken for granted as an actual reflection of historical development. Rather, Kant thinks that teleology can only be imputed to human society for 'heuristic and moral purposes'. See: Williams, H. 'Metamorphosis or Palingenesis? Political Change in Kant', *Review of Politics*, 63: 4 (2001) p.721. In this context Yirmiyahu Yovel argues that Kant's teleology anticipates Hegel's notion of the 'cunning of reason' as an attempt to intelligibly capture how the unplanned interweaving of human actions, driven not only by reason but also by natural desires and needs, develops ordered patterns of historical development with a clear direction and structure. In Yovel's account, Kant can be seen to have a notion of a 'cunning of nature' given his position that it is Nature or Providence that so structures human history. See: Yovel, Y. *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980). On Kant's observations on the role of Providence and Nature in defining humanity's historical teleology see also: Kleingeld, P. 'Nature or Providence? On the Theoretical and Moral Importance of Kant's Philosophy of History', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 85: 2 (2001) pp. 201-219. It is also important to refer Sankar Muthu's argument that Kant's reference to forms of universal sympathy and emotional identification constitutes a major shift in European orientation towards other people from conceived them as 'unrefined' savages to express a more cosmopolitan perspective associated with forms of modern secular humanism. See: Muthu, S. *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003) and also Linklater, A. *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States System*.

from striving to achieve the future constitution of the kingdom of ends. In this manner, Kant teleological account can be seen as fulfilling a fundamental orientating function regarding the approximation of human history to the transcendental preconditions of freedom.<sup>127</sup>

Reading Kant's philosophy of history as an answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation, we can highlight the role that he attributes to humanity's 'unsocial sociability' as one of the main structuring forces pushing human beings from a condition of animality towards one of rationality.<sup>128</sup> With this concept Kant refers to the apparent contradiction between people always striving for their independence and yet also being constantly drawn to each other's company, not only in the context of the fulfilment of their survival and emotional needs but also because their more unsocial inclinations towards domination and narcissism can only find satisfaction in other human beings. To Kant, the influence of these inclinations in human behaviour constitutes one the fundamental driving forces for the historical development of the human faculties for reason. On the one hand, people's unsocial character creates relations of conflict between individuals and groups which promote the development of reason and the capacity to exercise rational self-control over their inclinations in order to plan and invent ways of outsmarting and dominating each other. On the other hand, the development of reason itself, driven by unsocial inclinations, leads to a progressive increase in people's capacity to inflict injury and destruction upon each other and across longer distances, as their technological and social capacity for violence develops. Hence, Kant argues, a point is necessarily reached in the species' history in which not only the costs of mutual violence in conflict become too high to sustain, but war causes increasingly more damaging disruptions to the networks of human commerce which have come to cover the whole globe and on which all human beings and nations depend.<sup>129</sup> Consequently, different human groups locked together in violent relations of mutual competition and interdependence come to be obliged, by the compulsion of those very relations, to constitute higher forms of political organization capable of bringing their

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<sup>127</sup> In Horkheimer's view, Kant's assurance that the realization of a moral order and the removal of contradictions belong to the infinite, intelligible world is intended to help bring about change in the finite world. See: Horkheimer, M. *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (New York, The Continuum Publishing Company, 1976).

<sup>128</sup> Kant, I. 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', p. 44.

<sup>129</sup> Kant, I. 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', p. 47. For Kant's comments about the effect of commerce in the containment of the impulses towards war see: Kant, I. 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', p. 50 and Kant, I. 'Perpetual Peace', p. 114.



mutual conflicts under collective control and of managing them in a more peaceful manner.<sup>130</sup>

In this context, Kant refers to the historical emergence of the sovereign state as a partial solution to the dilemma posed by human beings' unsocial sociability. It is a form of political organization which, through an ideally posed social contract between individuals, enables people to collectively submit themselves to common laws that, made effective by the sovereign authority, pacify and regulate their social life and mutually interdependent competition. Such a social contract, Kant argues, only becomes historically possible because of the rational development that human beings have undergone driven by their unsocial character; but it becomes historically necessary because that same development has made the prevalence of unsocial inclinations ultimately unsustainable.<sup>131</sup>

From the perspective of our engagement with Kant's work as an answer to the problem of orientation, his philosophy of history can thus be read as not only orientating people in regards to the predominant dynamics and social processes which have shaped their conditions of existence, but also in understanding the choices that have been made available to them given the particular patterns that their mutual relations of interdependence have come to assume as an unplanned outcome of their intended and frequently mutually opposing actions. According to Kant, at a certain stage of human development, the prevalence of natural inclinations as the main determinants of human behaviour becomes a hindrance to the further development of the species and, on the basis of the rational capacity they themselves helped form, need to give way to reason and morality as the predominant forces shaping human history.<sup>132</sup> History, to Kant, thus constitutes a teleological process that, structured by the interplay of human unsocial sociability, moves inexorably from a condition of animality and predominance of

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<sup>130</sup> Kant, I. 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', p. 47. As Yovel argues, to Kant, human history is the result of the combination of the development of reason and its interplay with nature, as expressed in the notion of unsocial sociability. However, nature only plays a role in structuring human history up to a certain point, marked by the period of Enlightenment and the development of Kant's philosophy itself, beyond which reason assumes a more predominant role in shaping human development. See: Yovel, Y. *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, Chapter 4. For more on Kant's notion of unsocial sociability see: Williams, H. *Kant's Political Philosophy*, pp. 8-13; and Ferguson, M. 'Unsocial Sociability: Perpetual Antagonism in Kant's Political Thought', *Kant's Political Theory: Interpretations and Applications*, edited by Elisabeth Ellis, (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania University Press, 2012) pp. 150-169.

<sup>131</sup> Kant, I. 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', p. 47.

<sup>132</sup> Kant, I. 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History', p. 225.

inclinations, to one of true humanity, reason and freedom.<sup>133</sup> In Kant's words, it is 'nothing other than the transition from a rude and purely animal existence to a state of humanity; from the leading-strings of instinct to the guidance of reason, in a word, from the guardianship of nature to the state of freedom'.<sup>134</sup>

However, it is important to note that Kant does not see the long-term development of human reason as a wholly emancipatory process. Although it expresses a coherent and linear growth of the human capacity for freedom it also poses all manner of new entanglements in which human beings find themselves and that undermine their conscious self-determination. For example, Kant notes that as more animalic inclinations are brought under rational control, the pressing requirement for their immediate satisfaction can be delayed in order to attain a greater benefit in the long run. This ability has allowed humanity 'not just to enjoy the present moment of life but also to visualise what is yet to come, often in the distant future, [and it] is the most decisive proof of man's advantage'.<sup>135</sup> However, Kant also notes how this capacity does not come without cost. As humans develop greater rational self-control over their inclinations and are capable of managing them according to their foresight, so too they become open to 'the most inexhaustible source of cares and worries which an uncertain future evokes, and from which all animals are exempt'.<sup>136</sup> As such, while the historically developing capacity to use the rational dimension of their selves enables people to progressively become more self-determined, at the same time, it also constitutes a great source of anguish and internal strife, not only because of the awareness of an uncertain future, but also as a result of the constant struggle that humans have to engage with between their rational dimension and the constant lure of their inclinations.<sup>137</sup>

In this context, we can address Kant's conception of civilisation to note his argument that despite the progress achieved by human beings living in national sovereign states regarding their capacity to exercise some degree of conscious control over their inclinations and the networks of their mutual competitive interdependence, their 'civilised' condition is also constantly undermined by a displacement of human unsocial behaviour – and all the

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<sup>133</sup> According to Yovel, Kant sees history as the process in which the 'highest good' is realized, and in which the free activity of reason 'remoulds' the world into a moral world. History is thus the process where the 'synthesis' of freedom and nature occurs. See: Yovel, Y. *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, p. 31.

<sup>134</sup> Kant, I. 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History', p. 226.

<sup>135</sup> Kant, I. 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History', p. 225.

<sup>136</sup> Kant, I. 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History', p. 225.

<sup>137</sup> As Dupre notes, according to Kant we shall never 'unchallengedly possess our civilised state', since nature continues to 'lure us back to her protective womb' Dupre, L. 'Kant's Theory of History and Progress', p. 819.

conflict and strife associated with it – to the level of international politics.<sup>138</sup> Although essential for the survival of the human race as an animal species, people's more animalic inclinations thus necessarily come into conflict with their 'civilised state, a conflict which only a perfect civil constitution (...) can resolve'.<sup>139</sup> In the intervening period, 'between the state of nature and the state of perfection [human existence is] filled as a rule with vices and their consequences i.e. with human misery in its various forms'.<sup>140</sup> In light of the conceptual framework framing this study, we can argue that Kant's approach to the concept of civilisation throughout his writings expresses both a more involved and a more detached perspective. On the one hand, Kant refers to civilisation as a specific stage of human development, achieved with the historical formation of sovereign states and the degree of self-control over individual natural inclinations that human beings are capable of attaining in their context. This conception reveals a more involved perspective of civilisation, on the basis of which Kant makes a distinction between the 'civilised' Western European societies to which he belongs and the 'uncivilised' or 'savage' peoples which have not yet submitted themselves under a common system of law structured by a sovereign state. On the other hand, Kant's usage of the concept also frequently reveals an attempt to achieve a more detached perspective which understands civilisation as a slow and long-term historical process that affects the human species as a whole and is connected with the progressive development of human beings' capacity to use reason and learn how to self-control their natural inclinations. This more detached conception of civilisation is directly connected with Kant's attempt to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition and, as such, fulfils an important role in our analysis of Kant's work as an answer to the problem of orientation.

In particular, it can be read as a conceptual bridge uniting the two dimensions of orientation in Kant's writings. In the next section, we thus interpret Kant's characterisation

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<sup>138</sup> In this context, Williams shows how Kant thinks that human beings have reached a stage in their development where they are 'neither entirely the masters of nature nor are they entirely subject to its laws'. Although free in principle, humans are 'bogged down' in practice in a world which is not solely of their own making nor always subject to their control. See: Williams, H. *Kant's Political Theory*, p. 3. See also Kant's notion of 'radical evil' by which he captures how human beings are constantly liable to fall under the influence of their inclinations to the detriment of the moral law, even after attaining its transcendental knowledge and possessing the capacity to act accordingly. See: Allison, H. 'On the Very Idea of a Propensity to Evil', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 36, (2002) pp. 337-348 and Caswell, M. 'The Value of Humanity and Kant's Conception of Evil', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44: 4 (2006) pp. 635-663.

<sup>139</sup> Kant, I. 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History', p. 228.

<sup>140</sup> Kant, I. 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History', p. 226.

of civilisation as species-wide process which is simultaneously individual and social – entailing both the creation of the social conditions conducive to the use of reason and individual learning in taming natural inclinations – in a manner that fills the theoretical gap between his philosophy of history and his transcendental ascertainment of the kingdom of ends and the ideal conditions of freedom. In this manner, we discuss how Kant’s critical approach constitutes an attempt at answering the problem of orientation through a grand narrative of the species’ history which achieves a more cosmopolitan perspectives on the conditions of existence of globalised humanity and orientates people in understanding how they might come to exercise a greater degree of conscious and collective control over them.

#### **4. The triple constitutionalization of world politics**

In this section, we use Kant’s more detached conception of civilisation in order to show how it can be read as connecting the two dimensions of the problem of orientation in his work, i.e. his answer to the explanatory dimension in the form of a philosophy of history and his answer to the anticipatory dimension in the form of the transcendental ascertainment of the preconditions of freedom. On this basis, Kant’s work is interpreted as a means of orientation that provides, on the one hand, an understanding of the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping the species’ history and, on the other hand, an analysis of the potential these have gathered, and how this potential might be actualised, for the further development of human beings’ powers of control over their internal inclinations and the social processes in which they are enmeshed.

As we saw above, Kant argues that the global networks of interdependence brought about by trade and the expansion of human destructive capacity have effectively united the whole species through common social bonds that no one group is capable of controlling.<sup>141</sup> Under these conditions, humanity’s unsocial character can no longer continue to be the predominant force shaping human history. Although important for survival in the earlier stages of human development, humanity’s more animalic inclinations have come to be increasingly in contradiction with the development of civilisation and people’s capacity for rational self-determination. In this context, Kant observes that the manifestation of these

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<sup>141</sup> Kant, I. ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 108ff.

animalic impulses in inter-state conflict not only undermines the achievements of civilisation within sovereign states but also exhibits the extent to which the global character of human interdependence is not matched by a truly cosmopolitan form of political organisation on the basis of which people might bring these inclinations and their violent international expression under a greater degree of conscious control and thus approximate a condition which enables the more full expression of their powers of self-determination.<sup>142</sup>

His proposal for perpetual peace and the triple constitutionalization of world politics found in writings such as *'Perpetual Peace'* or the *'Metaphysics of Morals'* can thus be read in this context as providing orientation regarding how such a cosmopolitan condition can be at least approximated in history on the basis of the potential for rationality and civilisation that the long-term process of human development has gathered. Kant's argument is that all possible levels of human interdependence and interaction must be brought under a universal system of law whose content is an expression of the moral law inherent in the preconditions for freedom. As we discussed in section two, Kant proposes three levels of law: civil, international and cosmopolitan, respectively regulating relations between citizens inside a sovereign state, international relations between states, and cosmopolitan relations between states and world citizens.

In Kant's view, civil constitutions should confirm the republican character of sovereign states.<sup>143</sup> This means that each civil law should ideally be compliant with the moral principle that it could be expected to gather the free acceptability of all those who stand to be affected by it if they assessed the law they are given in accordance with its compatibility with the transcendental preconditions of freedom, i.e. if they assumed a truly universal perspective, detached from their particular interests, inclinations and points of view, in their assessment of the acceptability of the law. Such a test would ensure that laws are framed 'in such a way that they could have been produced by the united will of the whole nation, and regard each subject, in so far as he can claim citizenship, as if he had

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<sup>142</sup> Kant, I. *'Perpetual Peace'*, p. 112.

<sup>143</sup> Kant, I. *Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 56. Kant possesses a wide conception of republicanism. To Kant, a state is a republic if the ruling bodies are responsive to the will of the citizenry, and if all citizens are bound by common laws that guarantee their freedom. From this perspective, a constitutional monarchy would be considered republican. Kant defines a republican constitution as being founded on three principles: first, the principle of freedom for all members of a society; second, the principle of the dependence of everyone upon a single common legislation; and third, the principle of legal equality for everyone. See: Kant, I. *'Perpetual Peace'*, p. 99. For more on Kant's republicanism see: Bielefeldt, H. *'Autonomy and Republicanism: Immanuel Kant's Philosophy of Freedom'*, *Political Theory*, 25: 4 (1997) pp. 524-558.

consented within the general will'.<sup>144</sup> However, Kant also argues that this test can only be applied as such in a realm of pure rational beings, capable of spontaneously acquiring knowledge of the moral law in light of which they can assess the existing laws. Humans, as rational natural beings, cannot inherently attain this type of more universal perspective given the constant lure of their particular inclinations; as such, it cannot be expected that an entire society of people will reach unanimity. Rather, it will only show a majority of votes.<sup>145</sup> Consequently, the constitutions of republican states must rest on 'majority decisions [which] must be accepted unanimously and embodied in a contract; and this itself must be the ultimate basis on which a civil constitution is established'.<sup>146</sup> The ultimate test of universality thus cannot be carried out by human beings, and the enactment of laws must instead rely on majority rule to secure their legitimacy.<sup>147</sup> Such a mode of government, however, no longer ensures that these laws are compatible with the moral law and thus embody the preconditions of freedom. Instead, they become the outcome of the aggregation of more parochial points of view, driven by particular inclinations as these are expressed by the majority of the population of a state at a particular historical juncture.

In this context, Kant's observations regarding the universalising effect in people's perspectives of rational debate in the context of an open public sphere can be understood as providing orientation regarding how republican states can overcome the shortcomings associated with majority rule in a manner that allows them to also constitute the historical core for the consolidation of civilisation and for the development of the necessary human powers to overcome the historical entanglement brought about by the projection of people's unsocial character to the level of world politics. It is Kant's argument that

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<sup>144</sup> Kant, I. 'On the Common Saying: 'This May Be True In Theory, But It Does Not Apply In Practice'' in *Kant: Political Writings*, p. 79.

<sup>145</sup> Kant, I. 'On the Common Saying', p. 79.

<sup>146</sup> Kant, I. 'On the Common Saying', p. 79.

<sup>147</sup> In this context it is important to note that Kant's notion of 'majority rule' is not democratic. He establishes a difference between 'active' and 'passive' citizens, where the latter, because they are dependent on others for their existence – either for their means of livelihood or for their protection – do not have the right to vote given that they cannot freely exercise their will in independence. Hence, Kant excludes from active citizenship all wage workers, women and anyone who he considers not economically independent. See: Kant, I. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 126. Kant's distinction between active and passive citizenship is not, however, a fixed one. As Kant himself notes, whatever sort of positive laws the active citizens might vote for, these laws must not be 'contrary' to the law of freedom or compromise the equality between people, namely, the possibility that 'anyone can work his way up from this passive condition to an active one'. As such, Kant envisions a social process by which passive citizens become active as they acquire greater independence and the capacity to freely exercise their will without any bias from their relations of dependence with other human beings. For more on Kant's distinction between active and passive citizenship see: Weinrib, J. 'Kant on Citizenship and Universal Independence', *Australian Journal of Legal Philosophy*, 33 (2008) pp. 1-25.

republican states with a government which is responsive to the will of their citizenry and an open public sphere for the rational discussion of the law that should regulate social life gather the required conditions for the development of more cosmopolitan perspectives on the part of their citizens and for a more civilised pattern of rational self-control over their inclinations. Public debate and its influence over government cultivates the development of people's self-control over their particular points of view and desires as a condition for the collective assessment of interests and social norms, which obliges participants to learn rational detachment i.e. to step back from their more parochial and individual positions in order to take the others' points of view into account when assessing the validity and universality of proposed laws.<sup>148</sup> In this manner, republican states are liable to undergo a collective process of 'enlightenment' through which their citizens progressively attain a more detached perspective of their conditions of existence and a more civilised pattern of behaviour and internal conscious management of their animalic inclinations.<sup>149</sup> Such development is bound to bring to their consciousness the incompatibility between civilisation inside the state and a state of perpetual war at the level of world politics.<sup>150</sup> Consequently, the citizens of republican states appear to be in the best historical position to develop the necessary cosmopolitan perspective to better attune themselves to the reality of human global interconnectedness and to the problems it poses for human freedom while it is not matched by a cosmopolitan form of political organisation which unites humankind under a common system of law that regulates people's relations of mutual interdependence and brings under control the unplanned effects of human beings' more unsocial and animalic impulses.<sup>151</sup>

Kant's proposal for a League of Nations initially built around a core of republican states and eventually coming to encompass all of humankind can be seen here as an

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<sup>148</sup> For more on the importance of 'publicity' in Kant's political philosophy see: Davis, K. 'Kantian 'Publicity' and Political Justice', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 8: 4 (1991) pp. 409-421.

<sup>149</sup> For more on Kant's conception of enlightenment see: Kant, I. 'An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'' in *Kant: Political Writings*, pp. 54-60.

<sup>150</sup> Kleingeld considers that, to Kant, inter-state conflict tends to 'stifle' developmental processes within states as money that is necessary for education is used for weaponry and civil liberties that are necessary for enlightenment are curtailed in the name of the safety and security of the state. See: Kleingeld, P. 'Kant's Changing Cosmopolitanism' in *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim: A Critical Guide*, edited by Amelie Rorty and Jonathan Schmidt (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 174.

<sup>151</sup> In this context, Michael Doyle observes that Kant can be read as anticipating elements of liberal peace theory by highlighting the central role of republican states in establishing peaceful forms of international organisation based on legal regulation of inter-state relations. See: Doyle, M. 'Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12: 3 (1983) pp. 205-235.

orientating device on the basis of which the further civilisation of the species can occur and the ideal of the kingdom of ends approximated.<sup>152</sup> As we noted in section two, Kant observes that humans do not immediately recognise the transcendental model of a world federation of free and republican states as a precondition for their freedom. As such, the complete actualisation of the kingdom of ends might remain indefinitely beyond their grasp, making the establishment of ‘perpetual peace, [which is] the ultimate goal of the whole right of Nations, an unachievable idea’<sup>153</sup>. However, the possibility of human progress is not lost, since ‘the political principles directed towards perpetual peace, of entering into such alliances of states which serve for continual approximation to it, are not unachievable’<sup>154</sup>. Hence, the League of Nations appears as a normative standpoint of orientation that arises from an analysis of the potential gathered by the long-term process of human development and guides people as to how that potential can be used in a manner that at least approximates the kingdom of ends by bringing world politics more into line with the global character of human interdependence and the preconditions of human freedom.

As such, unlike the transcendental model of a world federation, Kant does not conceive of the League of Nations as initially encompassing the whole species or ever assuming sovereign authority which grants it the capacity to carry out punitive actions against the members-states which violate international law. Instead, the League is built around a small core of republican states committed to the further civilisation of their societies and the establishment of a condition of perpetual peace in their mutual relations. Furthermore, it should be an alliance that can be renounced at any time.<sup>155</sup> Kant’s position regarding the non-coercive character of the League is not to be explained only as a capitulation to the realist argument about states’ unwillingness to submit to a superior

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<sup>152</sup> Kant, I. ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 104. It is important to note, however, that while Kant conceives of civilisation as the historical path towards morality, he does not see them as equivalent. While morality is expressive of people’s free self-restraint over their more animalic inclinations and self-determined behaviour in accordance with the moral law, civilisation is expressive of a complex combination of voluntary self-restraint and compulsive external constraint to obey a certain pattern of self-control and behaviour, under the compulsion of the state and the threat of punishment. It is this distinction that leads Kant to observe that people can be ‘civilised to the point of excess in all kinds of social courtesies and proprieties, (...) but still a long way from the point where they could consider themselves morally mature’. As such, he observes that ‘while the idea of morality is indeed present in culture, an application of this idea which only extends to the semblances of morality, as in love of honour and outward propriety, amounts merely to civilisation’. See: Kant, I. ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose’, p. 49.

<sup>153</sup> Kant, I. *Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 156.

<sup>154</sup> Kant, I. *Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 156.

<sup>155</sup> Kant, I. *Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 151, also Kant, I. ‘Perpetual Peace’, p. 104.



authority.<sup>156</sup> Instead, it can also be read as an expression of his conception of civilisation as a long-term process through which human beings learn rational self-control over their inclinations and how to exercise their powers of self-determination. By making both the membership of the League and the adherence to its laws voluntary, Kant achieves two main effects. On the one hand, the cosmopolitan character of the League is preserved to the extent that it cannot become the instrument of a majority of member-states to impose their will, thus making the League an expression of particularistic interests and points of view which violates the self-determination of its members.<sup>157</sup> On the other hand, it ensures that the League fulfils a similar function, at the level of world politics, to that of the public sphere within republican states. By making its laws the subject of unanimous approval and voluntary respect, the League can constitute a true international forum for the consensualization of international norms based on the universalisation of perspectives. It creates the conditions under which each state is compelled to detach from its parochial points of view and particularistic interests and to assume a more cosmopolitan perspective which encompasses the points of view of the other participants in the deliberation process. In this manner, in light of Kant's more detached conception of civilisation, the League of Nations can be said to fulfil a fundamental civilising role, to the extent that, as it encompasses more and more states under a universal system of law which all of its members constitute and to which all voluntarily submit, it progressively approximates a true cosmopolitan condition in which the citizens of those states able to bring under their

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<sup>156</sup> In this context, Rawls considers that the League's non-coercive character requires 'qualification' in the case of extreme abuse of human rights by some states, Rawls, J. *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), while Habermas questions whether a non-coercive League is sufficient to guarantee human rights and international peace, Habermas, J. 'Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace: At Two Hundred Years Historical Remove' in *The Inclusion of the Other* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995) pp. 165-202. According to Beardsworth, Kant's option for a non-coercive League of Nations instead of the ideal of a world federation expresses the 'aporia' of world government embodied in the fact that the ideal institutional arrangement for human global self-determination also leads to a concern that a world republic runs the risk of 'dominating the geographical, cultural and linguistic plurality of the world'. As such, the norm of republicanism works at the domestic level in ensuring human freedom given the 'closeness' of government to the people in a delimited territory, but at the global level the 'political virtue' of republicanism turns into the 'political vice' of 'monarchic despotism'. Consequently, Beardsworth argues, Kant abandons the normative ideal of a 'world republic' as an inadequate idea of how to organise world politics. See: Beardsworth, R. *Cosmopolitanism and International Relations*, p. 32.

<sup>157</sup> In Kleingeld's view, forcing different states into the League of Nations would 'run counter' to the basic idea of a polity as a 'self-determining and self-legislating unity'. As such, even if it seems that citizens of brutally oppressive states would prefer to live under a republican federation rather than their oppressive rulers, it may in fact be that what they really want is to be in a position to decide for themselves. See: Kleingeld, P. 'Kant's Changing Cosmopolitanism', p. 309.

collective and conscious control the so far unplanned dynamics of their mutual global interdependence.<sup>158</sup>

A final aspect of our reading of Kant's proposal for the League of Nations as an orientating device bringing together both dimensions of the problem of orientation in his work is how Kant argues that complementing the civil law of republican sovereign states and the international law enacted by the tendentially global association of states, there should be a third level of law, cosmopolitan law based on the universal attribution of world citizenship to every human being on the planet. World citizenship expresses the truly cosmopolitan outlook of the League of Nations and its aspiration at actualising the ideal of the kingdom of ends. Its main purpose is to regulate the relations between sovereign states and individual human beings through the establishment of a universal right of hospitality. Kant describes universal hospitality as 'the right for a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory, (...) so long as he behaves in a peaceful manner in the place he happens to be in'.<sup>159</sup> The stranger can be turned away or denied entry by the state but only as long as this does not cause his or her death.<sup>160</sup> The implications of the right of hospitality are significant.<sup>161</sup> By entailing that states are under the obligation to accept into their territory individuals from other states if turning them away would entail their death, it effectively establishes a right of refugees, protecting them from any form of social or natural harm that could cause their death in their country of origin. It is thus oriented towards a universal expression of human sympathy that cuts across the parochial and more ethnocentric perspectives of sovereign states.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> According to Linklater, human development towards the gradual constitution of an Earthly kingdom of ends involves an 'unfolding of human powers towards anarchy', i.e. towards a condition in which coercion by law gradually recedes to be replaced by a form of self-constraint engendered by 'reverence for freedom and morality alone'. See: Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 114.

<sup>159</sup> Kant, I. 'Perpetual Peace', p. 105.

<sup>160</sup> Kant, I. 'Perpetual Peace', p. 105.

<sup>161</sup> There is much debate on the implications and content of Kant's cosmopolitan law. In particular, Benhabib argues that the law's 'right to visit' but lack of a 'right to settle' is too narrow to accommodate political refugees. A similar line of argument is followed by Jacques Derrida, who argues that although hospitality is the foundation of ethics, the right to visit and not to stay seems too limited. See: Benhabib, S. *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Derrida, J. *Of Hospitality* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000). In an alternative reading, Kleingeld considers that Kant's cosmopolitan law actually inaugurates a comprehensive law of refugees granting protection to both political and environmental refugees. See: Kleingeld, P. 'Kant's Cosmopolitan Law: World Citizenship for a Global Legal Order', *Kantian Review*, 2 (1998) pp. 72-90. See also: Brown, G. 'The Laws of Hospitality, Asylum Seekers and Cosmopolitan Right: A Kantian Response to Jacques Derrida', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 9: 3 (2010) pp. 308-327.

<sup>162</sup> Kant, I. 'Perpetual Peace', p. 106.

Furthermore, the right of hospitality also establishes that not only those visiting a state must be treated adequately, but also that those visiting other peoples' territories must obey the moral principles compatible with the freedom and dignity of the human person in their relations with them. In this context, Kant observes how his conception of cosmopolitan law implies an inherent critique of European colonialism, arguing that the conduct of 'civilised' Western states – in the more involved perspective of the term – reveals itself to be highly 'inhospitable'. When visiting non-European countries which, Kant notes, actually entail conquering them, the behaviour of Western nations is in marked contrast with cosmopolitan law, bringing upon the natives 'widespread oppression, the incitement (...) to war, famine, insurrection, treachery and the whole litany of evils which can afflict the human race'.<sup>163</sup> In light of cosmopolitan law, Kant argues that non-European peoples, having 'experienced such guests' have the right to 'placed restrictions on them' and limit the right to visit of European citizens to their territories.<sup>164</sup>

Kant's observations on European colonialism as a corollary of his proposal for perpetual peace and the triple constitutionalization of world politics is thus a clear expression of the extent of Kant's attempt to achieve a more cosmopolitan perspective in his work, which detaches itself from the point of view of the society and the time period to which he belongs. However, as we argue in the next section, despite the contribution of Kant's work for the development of a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition, it also exhibits serious limitations as an answer to the problem of orientation, which ultimately undermines its cosmopolitan character and shows it to be only the first step towards a more adequate means of orientation.

## 5. Universalism and history

Throughout this chapter we have addressed Kant's work as an answer to both the explanatory and the anticipatory dimensions of the problem of orientation. In particular, we focused on how Kant strives to achieve a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human

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<sup>163</sup> Kant, I. 'Perpetual Peace', p. 105.

<sup>164</sup> Kant, I. 'Perpetual Peace', p. 107. Kant thus shared with several other Enlightenment thinkers a strong opposition to European colonialism which, even if not present from the start, came to predominate in his political writings after the mid-1790s. See: Muhtu, S. *Enlightenment Against Empire* and Kleingeld, P. 'Kant's Second Thoughts on Race', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 57: 229 (2007) pp. 573-592.

condition which serves as a means of orientation on the basis of which people might acquire a better understanding of themselves, of the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping their history, and of how to better attune to their conditions of global interdependence in order to exercise a greater degree of conscious and collective control over them.

In this section, and with reference to Kimberly Hutchings and Andrew Linklater's critiques of Kant, we argue that Kant's contribution for the development of a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation lies also in the shortcomings of his work. Two interconnected shortcomings are particularly important for our inquiry. First, Kant's answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation through the transcendental ascertainment of the preconditions of freedom inherently entails a theoretical dualism between history and morality which poses a fixed conception of the ultimate end towards which humanity develops and ignores alternative paths of human historical development as legitimate expressions of human self-determination. And second, Kant's answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation in the form of a linear and teleological philosophy of history implies a conception of the history of the species that also blocks an awareness of the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development in a manner that inherently characterises as illegitimate, or as detour from the 'moral' path, all forms of human self-expression which do not reproduce Kant's conception of the structure of history and the stages of development of the species. As such, Kant's work reveals itself to be inadequate as a means of orientation and actually liable to reproduce forms of modernist myth that legitimize practices of domination, exclusion and violence between different parts of humanity, by privileging one particular expression of human self-determination as the 'moral' and 'universal' path of human development.

In the book *'Kant, Critique and Politics'*, Hutchings observes that a 'gulf' runs through Kant's work between his transcendental ascertainment of the moral law and the preconditions of freedom and his inquiry into history and politics.<sup>165</sup> In Hutchings's assessment, Kant's critical theory is unable to 'bridge' this gulf, as his theoretical connection between the transcendental ideal and the historical development of the species is never 'genuinely secure'.<sup>166</sup> As we saw in sections three and four above, Kant can be read as

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<sup>165</sup> Hutchings, K. *Kant, Critique and Politics*, p. 55.

<sup>166</sup> Hutchings, K. *Kant, Critique and Politics*, p. 55.

making this connection through a philosophy of history which interprets the long-term history of the species as if it is progressing towards the greater actualisation of the kingdom of ends. Essential in this context is Kant's more detached conception of civilisation as a species-wide long-term process characterised by the progressive development of human reason and people's capacity to rationally self-control their more animalic inclinations in a manner that sustains the widening of their perspectives in the direction of cosmopolitanism.

However, as Hutchings adequately observes, Kant's connection between the transcendental moral law and human empirical history depends only on the philosopher's own judgement and choice to read history 'as if' it obeys a linear and teleological structure of development; a choice which Kant cannot theoretically sustain as 'history needs not be read as progress, and the philosopher's judgement has no guarantee of effectiveness'.<sup>167</sup> Kant's philosophy of history thus has no other theoretical reason other than it fulfils the subjective need of the philosopher for history to have a rational meaning. As such, in the absence of determinate rules grounding the choice for the particular linear and teleological interpretation of history which Kant chooses as more adequate to address the long-term development of the species, his particular approach occupies an 'inexplicable no man's land' and becomes 'a peculiar invention, the legitimation of which (...) is mysterious'.<sup>168</sup>

Furthermore, Hutchings observes that by establishing the transcendental preconditions of freedom, in the form of the idea of the kingdom of ends, as the moral end of the species towards which human history develops, Kant's political thinking 'organises the world, spatially, temporally and morally in a particular way'.<sup>169</sup> The assumption of a linear and teleological path of human development necessarily implies that some parts of humanity are further along the road than others. As such, from the perspective of Kant's theoretical framework, the process of development of globalised humanity 'acquires a centre and a future in which the highest good is manifested, [in comparison with which] peripheral places become identified with temporal as well as spatial distance, backward in the progressive workings of history'.<sup>170</sup> In other words, Kant's theoretical framework implies that human groups whose course of development does not follow his linear and teleological model of the species' history are identified as either being 'backward' in terms of their

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<sup>167</sup> Hutchings, K. *Kant, Critique and Politics*, p. 55.

<sup>168</sup> Hutchings, K. *Kant, Critique and Politics*, p. 56.

<sup>169</sup> Hutchings, K. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', p. 193.

<sup>170</sup> Hutchings, K. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', p. 193.

development, or as incurring in some kind of developmental ‘error’. In either of these two cases, their difference can be attributed to either ‘immaturity’ or ‘ignorance’, ‘in which case, as in children, education is the answer (...) to set them right’.<sup>171</sup> As such, Hutchings argues, ‘spatio-temporal distances’ between human groups quickly become identified as forms of ‘moral distance’, in a manner that legitimizes practices of domination between different parts of humanity which envision putting those human groups that are considered backward or deviant back on the correct and moral path of human development.<sup>172</sup> In this manner, despite Kant’s stance against European colonialism, his own theoretical framework legitimizes, even if unwittingly, practices of domination and exclusion of difference and of the multiple forms of self-expression and self-determination of human beings.

In this context, we can also address Linklater’s critique of Kant’s work as in part echoing Hutchings’s arguments. In his book *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, Linklater refers to the historicist critique of universalist rationalism to observe that Kant, by assuming the possibility of ascertaining the *a priori* transcendental preconditions of freedom, poses the ‘existence of an immutable, universal set of human moral capacities’ in a manner which ‘ignores the complex social and historical forces which made universalism possible’.<sup>173</sup> It ignores the manner in which it is impossible to justify the existence of moral universalism in a transcendental manner, which is independent of its emergence in the actual course of human historical development.<sup>174</sup> Just like the choice to interpret history as if it is progressing towards the greater development of reason and the actualisation of the kingdom of ends, the conception of the moral law and the preconditions of the freedom as independent of the species’ history is not theoretically sustainable in a manner other than owing its existence to the subjective judgement and choice of the philosopher. As such, Linklater argues that a ‘more complete theory’ of human historical development must incorporate the historicist challenge to Kant’s universalism by recognising that ‘no immutable standard of morality is acknowledged by the whole of humanity’ and that morality is expressed in ‘several strands’ within different cultural contexts, in a manner that highlights the multi-linear character of human development.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Hutchings, K. ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’, p. 194.

<sup>172</sup> Hutchings, K. ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’, p. 194.

<sup>173</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 126.

<sup>174</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 126.

<sup>175</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 126.

However, Linklater also observes that this more complete theory cannot rely purely on a historicist perspective, which tends to highlight the differences between human groups in the same manner that Kant's universalism ignores them. The historicist approach frequently fails to acknowledge the development, under conditions of increasing global integration, of more universal modes of collective and conscious regulation of the patterns of human interdependence, on the basis of which more cosmopolitan perspectives on the human condition, as well as more universal moral standards, can develop and emerge historically. As such, Linklater argues that a more complete theory needs to bridge Kant's search for a cosmopolitan perspective with the historicist recognition of human different and the multi-linear character of human development. It would 'respond to the existence of social change and moral development by proposing an account of the [historical] emergence of universalism'.<sup>176</sup> Linklater's argument is that the beginning of such an approach can be found in Marx's materialist and emergentist conception of human development, a position which is supported by our inquiry into the problem of orientation in the next chapter.<sup>177</sup>

Hutchings and Linklater's critiques highlight the inadequacy of Kant's critical approach as a means of orientation. They show how the dualism he establishes between history and morality and his linear and teleological philosophy of history block an awareness of the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development in a manner that has important consequences when analysed from the point of view of both the anticipatory and the explanatory dimensions of the problem of orientation. Kant's theoretical framework excludes alternative expressions of human self-determination which do not match his conception of the linear path of the species' history. This exclusion inherently legitimizes practices of domination over these alternative forms of human self-expression in order to put them back on the correct path and approximate them to the moral centre of the species, expressed in those sections of humanity that most closely follow Kant's model of historical development, namely, the societies of Western Europe of which Kant is a member. As such, despite Kant's attempt to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition, the theoretical framework on the basis of which he tries to fulfil this task actually undermines his objectives and throws Kant back onto a more involved perspective which locks him in the moral and historical horizon of Western modernity. In this manner, Kant's

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<sup>176</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 126.

<sup>177</sup> Linklater, A. *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, p. 150ff.

work is inadequate as an answer to the problem of orientation given how, under the cover of its supposed cosmopolitanism, and even against the better intentions of its author, it expresses an involved, particularistic, society and time bound perspective of the history of the species, which blocks from awareness its multiple paths of development and legitimises practices of exclusion and violence between different sections of humanity.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we addressed Kant's classical texts from the perspective of our inquiry into the problem of orientation. This analysis led us to several interconnected conclusions. First, Kant's work clearly demonstrates how, under conditions of human global interdependence, a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation requires the development of theoretical frameworks which are capable of promoting a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition. Only in such a way can more parochial, ethnocentric and overall involved perspectives be tempered with a more detached conception of the conditions of existence of the human species on the basis of which people can be expected to attune to each other as human beings rather than as members of morally limited and self-regarding political communities. A more cosmopolitan means of orientation thus proves fundamental to help people collectively bring under greater conscious control the unplanned social processes arising from their global interconnectedness. Furthermore, Kant's work shows that a more cosmopolitan means of orientation requires the production of grand narratives that encompass the whole of humanity and are capable of theoretically linking a more adequate understanding of the species' history with an inquiry into the conditions for the expansion of human freedom.

In this context, our reading of Kant enables us to argue that a more adequate answer to both dimensions of the problem of orientation needs to understand the fundamental link between the dimensions of the triad of controls related to the development of human beings' capacity for self-control over their more animalic impulses, the development of more detached and cosmopolitan points of view, and the development of the human powers of control over social processes through the production of more universal norms regulating social interactions. Moreover, it shows that such an assessment needs to



encompass an analysis of the developmental interplay between social processes such as state formation, the development of social norms, and the dynamics of world politics.

However, Kant's work also shows that this inquiry cannot be carried out on the basis of a transcendental ascertainment of the ideal preconditions of freedom or of a linear and teleological philosophy of history. These two theoretical approaches – which can be identified as an attempt to answer, respectively, the anticipatory and the explanatory dimensions of orientation – are inadequate to the extent that they lead Kant to not only ignore the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development but to also pose an ideal model of human history which, taken as the species' universal and moral path, runs the risk of reproducing forms of modernist myth that hide a more involved perspective and can legitimize practices of domination and exclusion.

In this manner, our analysis of Kant's work reveals it as an important step towards a more cosmopolitan means of orientation regarding the conditions of existence of globalised humanity by highlighting some fundamental aspects that a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation has to encompass, as well as some of the more important shortcomings that it needs to overcome. In the next chapter, we move to an analysis of Marx's work in order to argue that his materialist and emergentist approach to human development points us in the direction of how these conditions can be fulfilled and a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation can be developed.

## **Chapter Three**

**Karl Marx**

### **The historical emergence of humanity**

In the previous chapter we interpreted Kant's work as an answer to the problem of orientation and argued that it highlights the need for a more cosmopolitan means of orientation which, based on a grand narrative regarding the long-term development of globalised humanity, provides human beings with a better understanding of their collective history and of how to exercise a greater degree of conscious control over its future development. In this context, we noted that Kant shows that a more adequate orientating framework requires a better grasp of the role assumed in the species' history by the interconnected development of human self-control and control over social processes and how it is expressed in the development of states, social norms and the constitutionalization of world politics.

However, our analysis also led us to argue that this orientating framework cannot be built on the basis of a transcendental ascertainment of the preconditions of freedom nor on a philosophical history that poses a linear and teleological model of human development. Such an approach inherently reproduces a form of modernist grand narrative which hides a more involved perspective that not only blocks an awareness of human diversity but also legitimises particularistic points of view and forms of domination.

In this chapter, we discuss Marx's work to argue that his materialist and emergentist approach to human development, by highlighting the role of another pair of the triad of basic controls – control over external non-human nature and control over social processes – opens the way for a more cosmopolitan perspective that overcomes the limitations found in Kant's critical theory. In particular, we observe how Marx's critical approach gathers the potential, on the one hand, for a multi-linear and open-ended model of human history and, on the other hand, for a historically-embedded and processual assessment of the conditions for the further expansion of people's capacity for self-determination. In light of our conceptual framework, Marx's work can thus be read as pointing us in the direction of a more adequate answer to both the explanatory and the anticipatory dimensions of the

problem of orientation by abandoning Kant's philosophy of history and the transcendental ascertainment of the preconditions of freedom.

However, we also argue that the same perspectival shift which enables Marx's critical theory to gather this potential, also ultimately leads him to squander it. Throughout his writings Marx attributes a linear causal role to human productive activity as the main determinant in the history of the species. This leads him to establish of a direct theoretical link between the material conditions of human existence and the development of people's perspectives, forms of emotional identification, and overall modes of attunement towards each other and the world. As such, Marx predominantly ignores several themes that Kant's work showed to be fundamental for a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation. In particular, he dismisses the concomitant role of the development of the human powers of self-control over their more animalic impulses and its connection with processes such as state formation, inter-state conflict and the linguistic consensualization of social norms. Consequently, Marx's work also highlights how a more adequate orientating framework needs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of controls in the long-term process of human development. In the absence of such an account, Marx ultimately falls into a philosophy of the subject which, by ignoring the fundamental condition of plurality of the human species, reproduces a form of modernist myth and reveals a more involved perspective on the human condition than that to which Marx aspires.

The chapter is organised in four main sections. In the first section, we argue that Marx's materialist and emergentist conception of human development gathers the potential for a more cosmopolitan perspective by providing the theoretical basis for both a model of the species' history which is multi-linear and open-ended and for a historically-embedded and processual assessment of the conditions of human self-determination. In the second section, we address Marx's theory of history to note that while his work gathers this potential for a more cosmopolitan perspective, his focus on the role of human productive activity also leads him to adopt a linear conception of the dynamics of human development that blocks its actualisation. In the third section, we discuss Marx's critique of capitalism in order to argue that it exhibits exactly this tension present in Marx's work between its potential for a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation and its linear conception of human history. Finally, in the fourth section, we analyse why Marx is unable

to overcome this tension and we discuss what we can learn from his work in order to develop a more adequate means of orientation.

Before we move to our analysis, a final note must be made. The treatment of Marx's writings in this chapter will not account for the separation that sometimes operates in the literature between the so-called early and later Marx.<sup>178</sup> This differentiation, arising both from the chronological order in which Marx's texts became known and from the apparent distinction between the more philosophically oriented early writings when compared to Marx's later work, is here overcome by an analysis of Marx's critical theory as a single body of thought. One whose internal differentiations have to be seen not in light of a confrontation of the early with the later Marx, but according to an internal analysis of the pattern of development of Marx's approach. In this context, the chapter expresses the view that despite differences arising mainly from a transition in Marx's analytical framework from philosophy to economics and sociology, the fundamental themes of his thought remain the same throughout. In particular, we are concerned with highlighting the maintenance of Marx focus on a materialist, emergentist and dialectic conception of human history, through which he strives to attain a more detached perspective of the main patterns of the long-term development of the species and orientate human beings in identifying and actualizing the immanent potentials gathered at each particular historical juncture that might enable them to 'make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing'.<sup>179</sup>

### **1. The humanism of nature and the naturalism of humanity**

In this section we argue that one of Marx's main contributions for the development of a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation lies in his analysis of the role of human control over non-human nature in the overall process of human development. On the basis of this analysis, Marx develops a materialist and emergentist approach to the long-term history of the species that gathers the potential for a more cosmopolitan perspective that

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<sup>178</sup> This distinction finds its origin in Louis Althusser's work and his argument about an 'epistemological break' between Marx's early and later writings, with the former being informed by philosophical humanism and the later showing a 'scientific' structural analysis and a theory of history and society that abandons all traces of humanism. See: Althusser, L. *For Marx* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1969); Althusser, L. and Balibar, E. *Reading Capital* (London, Verso, 1997).

<sup>179</sup> Marx, K. 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, p. 329.

captures its diversity and multiple possible paths and that provides a historically-embedded assessment of the conditions of human self-determination.

In texts such as the *'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts'*, *'The German Ideology'*, and *'Capital'*, Marx lays the theoretical foundations of his materialist and emergentist approach by arguing that a more adequate understanding of human historical development must rely not on the 'abstraction' of philosophical history, but rather on an understanding of human beings 'as they are', i.e. on the 'study of the actual life-processes and the activity of the individuals of each epoch'.<sup>180</sup> It must start from the basic conditions which make history possible, and the most basic of all, Marx argues, is that people 'before everything else, need to eat, to drink, a habitation, clothing and many other things'.<sup>181</sup> The first historical act is 'the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself'.<sup>182</sup> A more adequate understanding of human development thus depends on a theoretical framework which captures the necessary interactions between humans and non-human external nature, through which the former transform the latter into the objects of their needs.<sup>183</sup> Marx can be observed here to share Kant's conception of humans as natural beings subject to animalic inclinations. However, he also develops this conception in at least two ways. First, Marx highlights how the satisfaction of these natural inclinations requires the constant engagement in material productive activity. And second, he shows that as the human powers of control over nature develop, not only the manner of the satisfaction of these natural inclinations changes, but also new inclinations emerge throughout history in the form of social needs which were previously absent from the human animal.<sup>184</sup>

Marx defines productive activity as a process by which people mediate, regulate and control their metabolism with nature.<sup>185</sup> Given that human control over external nature constitutes the fundamental premise of the species' existence and of its continued survival it can be argued that, to Marx, human beings do not have the option of not exercising

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<sup>180</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 43.

<sup>181</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 47.

<sup>182</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 47.

<sup>183</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 47.

<sup>184</sup> However, it is important to refer that Marx attributes significant less analytical focus to human beings' self-control over their internal inclinations than does Kant, rather emphasising the transformation of human inclinations with the historical changes in the material conditions of human existence as a result of the productive activity of the species.

<sup>185</sup> Marx, K. *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 284.

control over nature, under penalty of threatening their sustenance and the reproduction of their conditions of existence. If at all, they have a choice regarding how this control is exercised in the context of historically changing conditions.<sup>186</sup> This position is grounded in Marx's argument that the particular type of control that humans have come to be historically able to exercise over nature differentiates them from all other species on the planet. Marx recognises that other animals also transform nature for the satisfaction of their needs, mentioning the beaver, bees and ants 'which build nests and dwellings'.<sup>187</sup> However, he also notes that while these animals produce only under the compulsion of their immediate needs and only according to the standards that are naturally inscribed in them – i.e. they only produce in a species-specific manner with little changeability between groups of individuals of the same species – an analysis of the development of human labour shows that human beings have historically developed the capacity to increasingly carry out their productive activity in a 'conscious' manner.<sup>188</sup> Hence, Marx argues that, unlike other animal species, humans have come to be able to produce according to self-defined standards, rather than only driven by the compulsion of their natural inclinations.<sup>189</sup> The historical emergence of human conscious activity explains the great diversity of modes of production and products of labour of different human groups and proves that human beings can make 'life activity itself an object of their will and consciousness (...) [and this] directly distinguishes them from [other] animals'.<sup>190</sup>

In this context, Marx observes that human adaptation to the natural environment has thus come to rely predominantly not on the development of specialized bodily organs, as occurs in other animals, but rather on the historical development of artificial adaptive

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<sup>186</sup> We owe this argument to Andrew Linklater, who advanced it in the context of a discussion of Norbert Elias's process sociology at the conference *'From the past to the present and towards possible futures: The collected works of Norbert Elias'*, Leicester, 20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> June 2014.

<sup>187</sup> Marx, K. 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London, Penguin Books, 1992) p. 328.

<sup>188</sup> Marx, K. 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 328.

<sup>189</sup> As Sean Sayers notes, Marx's concept of labour, with its Hegelian connotations, implies a conception of human beings that highlights their historical and developmental character. Labour is understood as a 'mediated relation' between human natural and animalic appetites and surrounding non-human nature which, unlike what occurs with other animals, is not driven purely by instinct but rather expresses a historically developing capacity for self-control; for a conscious 'deferral' of gratification in order to create the products of later consumption. In this manner, labour mediates the relation between the natural world and human beings' own natural desires in a manner that develops the human powers for conscious self-control and control over non-human nature and involves the historical emergence of a species of 'reflective, self-conscious beings'. See: Sayers, S. 'The Concept of Labour: Marx and His Critiques', *Science and Society*, 71: 4 (2007) p. 434.

<sup>190</sup> Marx, K. 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 329.

organs, in the form of tools which are fashioned through the conscious labouring of non-human nature into forms adequate for the satisfaction of human needs.<sup>191</sup> In a sense, nature came to be 'one of the organs of human activity, which is annexed to humans' own bodily organs', it is humanity's 'original tool house' and itself constitutes 'an instrument of labour'.<sup>192</sup> In Marx's assessment, the human capacity for rational self-determination thus cannot be interpreted as an *a priori* property of the species. Rather it is the product of the largely unplanned and long-term developmental process throughout which human beings, in the context of their labouring activity to satisfy their more animalic needs, have come to develop the capacity to more consciously control their metabolism with nature. As such, to Marx, in a very literal sense, the history of tool production and the development of technology express the history of the development of reason and of the emergence of the human powers of control and self-determination.<sup>193</sup> As people labour they bring out what is specifically human about them, developing their 'human-nature', i.e. their species-specific character as beings with a capacity for freedom. The history of the species comes to be characterised by Marx as a long-term process of 'humanization' of both nature and humankind, throughout which the human animal develops its specifically human character. It is in this sense, then, that Marx speaks of history as the slow emergence of the 'humanism of nature' and the 'naturalism of humanity'.<sup>194</sup>

In light of our engagement with the problem of orientation, Marx's materialist and emergentist approach points to a set of fundamental dynamics which have shaped the long-term process of human development and which have to be taken into consideration by any grand narrative that aspires to constitute a more adequate means of orientation. It shows that human beings' capacity to rationally escape the determination of nature and self-determine their conditions of existence is a historically emergent characteristic of the

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<sup>191</sup> It is worth recalling here Frederick Engels's observations on how the transition from apes to humans must have involved the combined processes of physical and cultural evolution, as the development of the hand and the brain accompanied the development of the defining human capacity to more consciously labour upon external nature. See: Engels, F. *Dialectics of Nature* (London, Wellred, 2012).

<sup>192</sup> Marx, K. *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 285.

<sup>193</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 44.

<sup>194</sup> Marx, K. 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 349 Jeremy Foster highlights how Marx relates his own views on human development to Darwin's theory of evolution. In this context, Marx considers the parallels and differences between the evolutionary processes of other animals, which occur through the development of specialized adaptive organs, i.e. 'natural technology', and human evolution that occurs predominantly through the historical development of technology, i.e. the fashioning of tools that express the development of human relations with nature. See: Foster, J. *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 2000), Chapter 6.

species that indeed distinguishes it from other animals, but which is grounded in the biological evolution of the human animal itself. In this manner, Marx avoids both a mechanistic materialism that reduces human beings to an expression of their biological characteristics and an idealist perspective that elevates them to beings that are somehow animated by a spiritual essence which is separate from the realm of natural evolution.

Furthermore, we can argue that by conceiving of human beings as a part of nature which has acquired the capacity to self-regulate its metabolism with the surrounding environment, Marx also promotes a more ecological and detached orientation towards human relations with the non-human part of the universe, in which the latter is no longer understood from a species-centric point of view as simply an object of manipulation and control which exists separately from humans. Instead, the historical emergence of the human powers of control over the natural environment – seen as a continuation of the evolutionary process on Earth – comes to be regarded as inherently connected with the conditions of natural sustainability on the planet. From this more detached point of view, the human capacity for self-determination is recognised to be dependent on fundamental conditions of natural sustainability which cannot be undermined but must be nourished and protected by the conscious part of the planet's biosphere. The penalty for the ignorance or violation of these conditions is the unplanned development of natural processes that have potentially harmful and disruptive effects both for humans and for the non-human part of the planet, causing what Marx characterises in *'Capital'* as the 'disturbance of the metabolic interaction between human beings and the Earth'.<sup>195</sup>

In this context, Marx develops a harsh environmental critique of capitalism noticing how its incessant mania for the accumulation of capital, while radically expanding the human capacity to control nature, does so on the basis of what we can characterise as a more involved orientation towards nature, which understands it as a separate object that exists only for manipulation and exploitation. As such, and referring to capitalist large-scale agriculture in particular, Marx observes that its 'development of the social process of production [is based] on the simultaneous undermining of the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker'.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Marx, K. *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 638.

<sup>196</sup> Marx, K. *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 638. For a more in-depth discussion of Marx's critique of capitalism in light of his ecological perspective of human relations with non-human nature see: Foster, J. *Marx's Ecology* and Burkett,



Furthermore, our reading of Marx's work as an expression of a more detached and ecological perspective of human relations with nature can also be extended to demonstrate how Marx's materialist and emergentist approach can constitute the basis for a more cosmopolitan means of orientation that captures the multi-linear and open-ended character of the long-term process of human development. As we mentioned above, Marx considers that the specifically human mode of life is connected with peoples' capacity to consciously transform nature in order to satisfy their needs. As such, whether or not to exercise control over nature is not an option which is historically open to human beings, as their very survival depends on it. Rather, the historical challenge which emerges throughout the history of the species – and which is expressed with particular clarity by Marx's more ecologically oriented observations – is how to exercise that capacity for control in a manner which ensures that human beings are able to self-determine their conditions of existence without producing unintended social processes which entail unplanned harmful consequences both to themselves and to the natural environment of which they are a part. Humans are thus faced with the historical challenge of *more consciously controlling their own capacity for control*. A challenge which is inherently connected with the adequacy of the means of orientation that are available to people at each particular moment in history, given that its answer depends on human beings' capacity to grasp the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping the long-term development of their powers of control, and orientate themselves as to how to exercise them in a more conscious and self-determined manner which avoids their unplanned and disruptive effects.

Moreover, it can be argued that from the perspective of Marx's materialist and emergentist approach the answer to this challenge cannot be found through the transcendental ascertainment of the ideal preconditions of human self-determination. Instead, it depends on an empirical and historical assessment of the predominant social forces shaping the process of human development and on an identification of the immanent potential these gather, at each particular historical juncture, for an expansion of the human powers of conscious control. As such, a reading of Marx's work from the perspective of our inquiry, leads us to argue that Marx advances an answer to the anticipatory dimension of

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P. *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective* (New York, Haymarket Books, 2014). For a critique of Marx for his supposedly anti-ecological position see: Giddens, A. *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, vol. 1: Power, Property and the State* (London, Macmillan Press, 1981), pp. 59-60 and Benton, T. 'Marxism and Natural Limits', *New Left Review*, 178 (1989) pp. 51-86.

orientation which is not transcendental but rather processual and historically-embedded, to the extent that it implies a normative commitment to the expansion of human self-determination but recognises that this implies different things, to different human groups, in different moments and areas of their historical process of development, and thus cannot be expressed by a fixed and universal blueprint of the ideal conditions of freedom.

In this manner, Marx's materialist and emergentist approach to human development provides us with the theoretical resources to overcome several of the shortcomings connected with Kant's critical theory. First, it abandons the need for a transcendental normative standpoint of orientation which, by being fixed and supposedly universally valid across space and time, is also theoretically disconnected from the actual course of human historical development, thus establishing a gulf between the actual living conditions of human beings and the transcendental ideal conditions of freedom. And second, by historicising the conditions of human self-determination and understanding them as part of the long-term process of human development, Marx's approach also opens the way for an engagement with the explanatory dimension of orientation which is based on a multi-linear and open-ended model of the species' history that acknowledges and recognises the legitimacy of its multiple paths and forms of human self-expression. As such, Marx's work exhibits the potential for the development of a more cosmopolitan means of orientation which presents a more detached perspective on the human condition by recognising both the historical emergence of the human powers of control and their multiple forms of expression throughout the species' history. In this manner, a means of orientation based on Marx's materialist and emergentist approach can not only overcome the dualism between morality and history found in Kant's work, but can also potentially overcome the linear and teleological conception of human development implied by philosophical history and thus more adequately avoid a reproduction of modernist grand narratives that hide more involved, parochial and ethnocentric world-views.

However, as we argue throughout the rest of this chapter, Marx is unable to actualise the potential found in his work for the attainment of a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition. In particular, his analytical emphasis on the role of human control over non-human nature in the species' history leads him to attribute causal primacy to human productive activity in detriment of other dynamics shaping human development, such as social norms, the formation of political community or the dynamics of

world politics and how, as we saw in the previous chapter, these are connected with the development of people's capacity to self-control their more animalic impulses and with the universalisation of people's modes of attunement towards each other and the world. As such, in the next two sections, we argue that an analysis of the shortcomings of Marx's work is also instructive for our inquiry, given how it points to the need of a grand narrative which is capable of providing a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of basic controls on the basis of a materialist and emergentist model of human historical development that captures its multi-linear and open-ended character. In the absence of such a model, any answer to the problem of orientation inevitably reproduces modernist forms of myth that ignore the plurality of species and express more involved and parochial points of view which are unable to either understand or eliminate the particular relations of domination and exclusion which are connected with them.

## **2. Production and history**

In this section we address Marx's theory of history from two points of view. In the first subsection, we discuss it as an answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation by noticing how it attempts to produce a theoretical framework that captures the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping the long-term development of the species. In particular, we focus on the connection that Marx establishes between the development of human control over nature and that of more cosmopolitan perspectives and universal forms of attunement between people to argue that, despite Marx's many insights, his attribution of causal primacy to human productive activity in his account of these processes leads to a linear and unitary model of the species' history that undermines its adequacy as an orientating framework. In the second subsection, we further develop this argument by focusing on Marx's dialectical conception of human historical development to note how the potential of his historically-embedded and processual assessment of the conditions of human self-determination to provide a more adequate answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation is ultimately undermined by Marx's linear theory of history.

## 2.1. The universalisation of humanity

Marx's theory of history is presented with most clarity in works such as *'The German Ideology'*, *'Grundrisse'*, or *'Capital'*. According to Marx, a more adequate understanding of the human condition depends

'on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material product of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (...) as the basis of all history, and to (...) explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics etc. and trace their origins and growth from that basis: by which means, of course the whole thing can be depicted in its totality, and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of the various sides on one another'.<sup>197</sup>

It is our argument, however, that Marx's attribution of causal primacy to productive activity makes him unable to attain the degree of detachment required to capture the 'reciprocal action of these various sides on one another'. Instead, it leads him to a linear grand narrative in which people's control over nature is identified as the main dynamic shaping the development of individual identities, patterns of behaviour, forms of mutual identification and basic orientations towards the world and social relations. From the perspective of our engagement with the problem of orientation, Marx's linear theory of history locks him into a more involved perspective of the human condition which fails to recognise how social processes such as the monopolisation of force by the state, inter-societal relations, and processes of linguistic consensualization of social norms shape human history in a multitude of ways and produce different forms of human self-expression which cannot be traced to the linear causality of human technological development. In this manner, he tends to present a linear and tendentially teleological model of the species' history that reproduces the shortcomings of Kant's philosophical history by ignoring the diversity of humankind and presenting a more involved and Wester-centric perspective of human development that understands the differences of human groups that do not follow the developmental path of the West as evidence of developmental backwardness which needs to be brought into line with the more advanced sections of humanity, understood as

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<sup>197</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 188.

those which have attained a higher degree of conscious control over nature.<sup>198</sup> As such, Marx not only fails to recognise human plurality, but also ignores forms of exploitation and exclusion between people whose character cannot be reduced to their material conditions of existence but depends also on their belonging to self-regarding communities and their associated prejudices based on ethnocentric personal identities and more parochial forms of orientation, as is the case of discrimination and exclusion based on gender, nationality, ethnicity or religion.<sup>199</sup> Hence, despite Marx's efforts to produce a more comprehensive model of human development and attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition, again and again he returns to the attribution of causal primacy to human productive activity in a manner that undermines his capacity to actualise the potential in his own materialist and emergentist approach for a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation.

When addressing Marx's theory of history from the perspective of the explanatory dimension of orientation it can be observed that, by placing human relations with nature at the centre of his analysis of historical development, Marx characterises each stage of that process as the 'material result (...) of a sum of productive forces which, expressed in a historically created relation to nature and of individuals to one another, is handed down to each generation from its predecessor'.<sup>200</sup> Each of these stages is 'modified by the new generation, but also prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it a definite

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<sup>198</sup> In this context, Linklater refers to the 'binary division' between the progressive West and the 'retarded' non-Western part of humanity which is evident in Marx's work, particularly in his more journalistic writings on India. As Linklater notes, these texts show Marx's 'exuberance' for the loss of self-sufficiency on the part of non-Western peoples in a manner that reveals the little value that he attaches to the survival of radical cultural differences. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 39. However, this interpretation of Marx's work has also been contested by Kevin Anderson who argues that Marx progressively became aware of the 'problematically unilinear perspective' that characterises his work. According to Anderson, from 1853 onward Marx began to shift from the linear perspective of '*The Communist Manifesto*', and to struggle to develop a 'multi-linear and non-reductionist theory of history' capable of analysing the complexities and differences of non-Western societies and thus 'refusing to bind himself into a single model of development or revolution'. However, Anderson recognises that this theoretical shift only found its way into Marx's main works as a 'subtheme', particularly in the revised French edition of '*Capital*' in 1872. See: Anderson, K. *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2010). As such, we can argue that the fact remains that Marx, even though progressively becoming aware of the potential in his materialist and emergentist approach for a multi-linear and open-ended model of human development, ultimately failed to actualise this potential and remained locked in a more involved and Western-centric perspective.

<sup>199</sup> According to Linklater, Marx underestimates the 'tenacity' of nationalism and the state and fails to anticipate the crucial role that war plays in shaping the boundaries of political community. See: Linklater, A. *Transformation of Political Community*, p. 39. See also: Giddens, A. *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, vol. 1.

<sup>200</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 62.

development, a special character'.<sup>201</sup> The challenge in making the movement of human development more intelligible thus lies in understanding the predominant social dynamics which constitute the 'real ground' of human history and that shape it to assume particular directions and produce specific material results.<sup>202</sup> In Marx's view, amongst these dynamics the development of the division of labour, and the way it connects the development of human control over nature and over social processes, is one of the most prominent.

Expressed in the functional and technological specialisation of human productive activity, the division of labour arises in an unplanned manner within the labour process. In the earlier stages of human history, it is 'nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then that division of labour which develops spontaneously or 'naturally' by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g. physical strength, needs, accidents, etc.)'.<sup>203</sup> But as people transform nature to meet their needs and, in the process, acquire a more adequate understanding of its natural processes and how to control them, so too they develop increasingly more specialized tools and areas of activity to mediate their interactions with it. The overall direction of the historical development of humanity is thus towards the increase in the division of labour, the specialization of productive activity between different individuals and groups and the growth of human conscious control over non-human nature.

However, Marx also observes that as the division of labour increases, each individual's social activity becomes more circumscribed and social groups come to be differentiated according to their respective position in the overall process of social production, thus progressively becoming differentiated as social classes.<sup>204</sup> The historical consolidation of different social classes with different areas of social activity and specialized functions means that the satisfaction of human needs comes to depend more and more on wider and more intricate networks of production which, through commerce, come to link together distant societies and groups of people in relations of mutual functional interdependence upon which all depend for their survival and for the reproduction of their conditions of existence. According to Marx, in the most advanced stages of social development, when the division of labour is particularly high, 'almost every piece of work

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<sup>201</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 62.

<sup>202</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 62.

<sup>203</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 50.

<sup>204</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 51.

done by a single individual is part of a whole, having no value or utility of itself'.<sup>205</sup> Every area of activity thus comes to be necessarily bound in long webs of human interdependence that complement it and give it meaning both within and across different societies. Furthermore, Marx argues that this process of growing interdependence is neither linear nor conflict free and occurs in a largely unplanned manner throughout history. As the division of labour develops, people's relations of mutual interdependence evolve and assume different patterns in an almost 'natural' manner, i.e. they are 'not subordinated to a general plan of freely combined individuals, but proceed from various localities, tribes, nations, branches of labour, each of which to start with develops independently of others and only gradually enters into relations with others'.<sup>206</sup>

The predominantly unplanned character of this process means that, as different classes and human groups are thrown together in mutual dependence, all manners of tensions and conflicts arise between them, as they struggle with each other in an attempt to control the social bonds that unite them in ways that are more advantageous to each particular group. All the more so given how belonging to a particular class implies not only different specialised forms of activity, but also different forms of ownership and access to the production of social labour.<sup>207</sup> These struggles and the interweaving of multiple intentional actions of human beings across ever expanding networks of production further reinforce the overall unplanned character of the social processes in which people are enmeshed. Consequently, the human social bond predominantly develops in unplanned directions that no singular person or group is capable of fully controlling or even understanding. In this manner, Marx observes that the growth of human control over nature throughout the history of the species is not concomitant with a similar growth of

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<sup>205</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 709.

<sup>206</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 91. In this context, Kees Van Der Pijl develops Marx's materialist position to produce a theory of world history focused on the development of interconnectedness between societies of human beings accompanying the development of their relations of production. See: Pijl, K. *Nomads, Empires, States*.

<sup>207</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 38. As Linklater observes, to Marx, the character of human relations is expressive of the stage of development of the forces of production. Especially at stages of human development in which human control over nature is low, inter-societal estrangement and competition for resources and the means of production are predominant features of human existence. The historical emergence of more inclusive communities and relations of cooperation between societies depends on the development of their productive capacity and the patterns of distribution of the social product associated with their particular division of labour. See: Linklater, A. *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, p. 36. See also: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 34.

conscious and collective control at the level of human social relations. Instead, it actually reinforces the lack of human control over social processes.<sup>208</sup>

In this context, Marx's work also provides us with a fundamental insight regarding the connection that operates historically between the expansion of people's control over nature, the transformation of human material conditions of existence and bonds of social interdependence, and the changing forms of orientation and mutual identification between people. According to Marx, accompanying the changing patterns of human global interdependence, people's perspectives of themselves, the world and each other also undergo a transformation which is connected with the development of the division of labour. The overall direction of this change, in Marx's view, is towards the development of more cosmopolitan perspectives of the human condition and of the relations between human beings, nature and society.

Considering human relations with nature, Marx argues that as the division of labour progresses, human knowledge of natural processes increases in many of its dimensions, as does people's capacity to exert greater conscious control over increasingly smaller and finer areas of their natural metabolism. People's relations with the non-human part of the universe thus become more multi-sided and specialized, and their conceptions of nature progressively come to contemplate it in an increasingly universal manner. The latest stage in this long-term process – but by no means the last – is reached with the capitalist mode of production, when human consciousness of nature ceases to be mere 'nature-idolatry' to instead perceive it as 'an object for humankind'.<sup>209</sup> While human beings at an earlier stage of development perceive nature as a 'completely alien, all powerful and unassailable force, with which man's relations are purely animal and by which they are overawed like beasts', human relations with nature under capitalism can be characterised as more detached, being

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<sup>208</sup> Erich Fromm notes how Marx shows that human beings might have become 'masters of nature' but remain 'slaves of things and circumstances' and the 'powerless appendage' of a world which is an 'expression' of their own powers. Fromm, E. *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York, Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1961), p. 52.

<sup>209</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 50. According to Kilminster, Marx considers that human beings are a 'conscious part of nature' although nature is also experienced as an 'in-itself, as alien'. It is people's conscious social activity that enables them to 'master and appropriate' the in-itself of nature in order to satisfy their needs. As such, Kilminster argues that Marx's conception of nature simultaneously has a socially imprinted character and an autonomous role in the process of human development. See: Kilminster, R. *Praxis and Method: A Sociological Dialogue with Lukács, Gramsci and the Early Frankfurt School* (London, Routledge, 1979), p. 14.



focused 'on the theoretical discovery of its autonomous laws (...) so as to subjugate it under human needs, whether as an object of consumption or as a means of production'.<sup>210</sup>

If people's conceptions of nature become more universal as they bring it under increasingly finer, multi-sided and conscious control, Marx argues that a similar process occurs in people's mutual attunement to each other as their social bonds of interdependence become increasingly global and more intricate. According to Marx, as the division of labour increases in connection with the expansion of human control over nature, the products of social labour also multiply. As these products become more differentiated and of more diverse origin, human beings also become more interdependent with each other, not only in their productive activity but also in their patterns of consumption, as international trade grows and new socially produced needs constantly emerge. Hence, human social production and needs become increasingly more refined and demand global intercourse for their satisfaction. As Marx observes, in 'place of old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climates'.<sup>211</sup> In place of the 'old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations'.<sup>212</sup> The development of the division of labour thus transforms human needs and basic modes of orientation towards the world and gives them a more universal, multi-sided, highly refined and all-round character. In this context, Marx argues that as the webs of social interdependence become lengthier and more intricate, effectively assuming a global character, human intercourse also becomes progressively universal, encompassing the whole species. Hence, in place of local, particular individuals whose intellectual and moral horizons stop at the frontier of their particular political communities, the bonds of interdependence that the division of labour produces pose the historical emergence of 'world-historical' individuals; i.e. people whose perspectives are shaped by increasingly cosmopolitan standards, who relate universally to nature and to the species, and whose

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<sup>210</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 50 and Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 410. However, as we argued in the previous section, the level of detachment reached under capitalism still reveals a highly involved and species-centric perspective which has significant consequences for the sustainability of the human metabolism with nature.

<sup>211</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. 'The Communist Manifesto', p. 249.

<sup>212</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. 'The Communist Manifesto', p. 249.

emotional identification and forms of attunement encompass increasingly wider groups of human beings.<sup>213</sup>

In this manner, Marx's theory of history establishes a direct causal link between the development of human control over nature and the universalisation of people's perspectives and modes of orientation. However, as we argued in the beginning of this subsection, this connection is not sustainable under a critical scrutiny that highlights the extent to which Marx attributes less causal weight in his analysis to other social processes, such as the development of political community and the linguistic consensualization of social norms, which, as we addressed in the context of our analysis of Kant's work in the previous chapter, are also fundamental factors in the development of people's perspectives and the universalisation of their modes of attunement. However, Marx's work also clearly shows that a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation needs to combine an analysis of these social processes with his insights regarding the connection that operates between the development of the human material conditions of existence, the historical emergence of more detached and cosmopolitan perspectives, and the possibility of a more adequate assessment of how human beings can come to exercise a greater degree of conscious control over their conditions of existence. A more adequate means of orientation thus depends on a more comprehensive assessment of the role of the interplay of the triad of controls in the species' history and how it is manifested in the interweaving of social processes that encompass human technological development, the division of labour, the monopolisation of force by states, the dynamics of world politics and the development of legal frameworks regulating human interdependence. In the next subsection, we further develop this argument by returning to a discussion of how Marx's materialist and emergentist approach, now considered in the context of his theory of history, can be read as providing a non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation.

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<sup>213</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 54.

## 2.2. The dialectical movement of history

Throughout his work, Marx characterises the long-term process of human historical development as dialectical. Two main arguments can be made with reference to Marx's conception of the dialectical movement of history regarding the problem of orientation. First, Marx's dialectical analysis can be interpreted as a further development of his answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation which seeks to capture the predominant dynamics shaping the species' history. And second, we argue that his dialectical conception of human development also expresses how Marx's non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation can be applied to historical analysis in a manner that helps constitute an orientating framework regarding how human beings might come to exercise a greater degree of conscious and collective control over their conditions of existence.

According to Marx, the dialectical movement of human history is exhibited in the fact that, at any given historical juncture, a certain pattern of social interdependence and its class structure – corresponding to a particular stage of development of the forces of production, the division of labour, the relations of production and their associated forms of ownership – might constitute the necessary social context for the development of human productive activity. However, as technology and the division of labour develop, the relations of production do not transform themselves automatically in order to accompany these changes. Instead, modes of social intercourse tend to resist change, as the classes that benefit from their particular pattern of relations of power and interdependence try to maintain them unaltered in order to protect their social status and interests. Consequently, the same relations of production that might have been conditions for the development of human productive activity in the past eventually come to constitute a barrier to its further development. Hence, Marx observes that a predominant pattern of human historical development has been that in place of an earlier 'form of intercourse which has become a fetter, a new one is put, corresponding to the more developed productive forces and, hence, to the advanced mode of the self-activity of individuals, a form which in its turn becomes a fetter and is then replaced by another'.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 91.

It is Marx's argument that the main historical manifestation of this dialectical movement is the social confrontation between, on the one hand, those classes whose position in the division of labour and relations of production enables them to own the means of production and who thus possess an active interest in the maintenance of the inherited state of affairs and, on the other hand, those classes who do not control the means of production and thus would benefit from a change in the predominant patterns of human relations of interdependence. To Marx, the transformation of the inherited social form can only occur if the classes interested in such a transformation are capable of carrying out a revolutionary overthrow of the ruling conservative classes. However, the success of such revolutionary movement is always conditioned by the actual development of productive activity and the corresponding universalisation of people's perspectives and social intercourse.<sup>215</sup> As Marx notes, only when the 'contradiction' between the development of the forces of production and the predominant relations of production in society has reached its zenith and, concomitant with these, a sufficient universalisation has been achieved of the social bond and of people's perspectives and modes attunement to each other – especially between the members of those classes which lack control over the means of production – can a successful revolution occur.<sup>216</sup> The revolutionary dispossessed classes thus need to be bound together both by their shared material conditions of existence and, connected with them, by their shared orientations towards the world for a successful revolutionary movement to occur.<sup>217</sup> Until these objective and subjective conditions have been gathered historically, 'it is absolutely immaterial whether the idea of revolution has been expressed a hundred times already'.<sup>218</sup>

As Marx argues, once a revolution is successful, a new pattern of relations of production is established by the revolutionary classes, which becomes the new boundary condition for the further development of human productive activity. Then, the whole

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<sup>215</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 17. Marx explains historical change through a combination between the development of the forces of production and the universalisation of people's intercourse and perspectives. Only the combination of these factors can account for a successful revolution and transformation of the predominant mode of intercourse. Hence, Marx conceives both technological development and human conscious agency as co-factors in successful revolutionary processes of historical change. For a more mechanistic reading of Marx that attribute a causal explanatory function predominantly to the development of technology. See: Cohen, G. *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978).

<sup>216</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 62.

<sup>217</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 62.

<sup>218</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 62.

process is once again reproduced at a higher stage of development. The previously revolutionary classes eventually become the ruling conservative upholders of their established order, while other classes will come to claim a revolutionary transformation of society in order to actualize the immanent potential that has gathered in whatever further innovations have occurred at the level of human forces of production and the universalisation of people's perspectives and forms of intercourse.<sup>219</sup>

In Marx's view, this dialectical movement of human development is a product of the fact that despite each social order inaugurated by a new ruling class expressing a greater degree of universality both in people's perspectives and in the expansion of the human powers of control over nature, still, each of them is ultimately revealed as limited in its character and transitions from being a condition for the development of the forces of production to become a fetter upon them.<sup>220</sup> Hence, this dialectic derives mainly from the fact that the development of human productive capacity has hitherto remained incapable of solving the fundamental problem of the scarcity of the means for the overall satisfaction of the historically expanding needs of human beings. As such, because of these prevalent limitations, all revolutions that have occurred so far in the species' history have become only a question of a transformation in the distribution of the product of social labour and a change in the distribution of labouring activity between different people.<sup>221</sup> In this manner, all historical modes of production have necessarily implied the continued existence of relations of domination and exploitation between ruling and ruled classes, with different levels of access to the products of social labour and different relations to productive activity. As Marx observes all emancipation carried out hitherto has been based on 'restricted' productive forces.<sup>222</sup> As such, throughout the history of the species development has been possible

'only if some persons satisfied their needs at the expense of others, and therefore some – the minority – obtained the monopoly of development, while others – the majority – owing to the constant struggle to satisfy their most essential needs, were

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<sup>219</sup> As Linklater notes, Marx conceives of the long-term process of human development as entailing an 'ascent to universality', in the sense that universalism is an emergent product of historical development rather than a prior condition of human existence see: Linklater, A. *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, p. 35.

<sup>220</sup> The dialectic of history thus possesses a 'tragic' element in that the historical development of freedom is always accompanied by its own negation. See: Linklater, A. *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, p. 37.

<sup>221</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 60.

<sup>222</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 456.

for the time being (i.e. until the creation of new revolutionary productive forces) excluded from any development'.<sup>223</sup>

This exposition of Marx's analysis of the dialectic of human history allows us to more clearly discuss how his non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation can be applied to an analysis of human historical development concerned with providing orientation to human beings as to how they can exert a greater degree of collective and conscious control over their conditions of existence. As seen in the first section, Marx maintains a normative commitment to the expansion of people's capacity for self-determination and thus to their ability to make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing. This entails, first of all, people's capacity to consciously control their metabolism with nature, and second, their capacity to collectively exert control over their social processes. Both of which depend on the progressive universalisation of people's perspectives and modes of mutual identification as they develop more cosmopolitan and less parochial orientations towards each other and the non-human part of the universe. From the perspective of Marx's dialectical understanding of history, this normative position requires a historically embedded assessment of the immanent potential, gathered at each particular historical juncture, for the actualisation of social relations which embody and enable the development of these more universal perspectives, forms of intercourse and relations with nature. As such, Marx's assessment of the conditions of human self-determination is always historically-embedded and processual, varying with the place in the dialectical movement of history in which the critical thinker might find him or herself at each particular moment. Consequently, Marx's answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation, rather than involving the establishment of a transcendental blueprint of the ideal conditions of freedom which are considered universally valid, is based on a historically-contextualised normative preference for those forms of social intercourse, and those social classes that, at any particular moment in the history of the species, more adequately promote the further development of human self-determination. Hence, Marx is capable of

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<sup>223</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 456. According to Shlomo Avineri, all revolutions which have so far occurred in the species' history have only 'shifted' the control over the means of production and property from one class to another, but have not transformed the nature of this control. As human self-determination depends on the stage of development of the forces of production and the degree of universality these have attained, all historical modes of production, because they were merely particular, could not 'carry out universal postulates; they stopped midway, tangled in class arrangements'. See: Avineri, S. *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 172.

supporting, on a normative basis, a specific form of social intercourse that produces the conditions for the further development of human productive capacity at a particular historical juncture, to then come to criticize that same form of intercourse once it has become a barrier to the further development of the human powers of control and has created, immanent in it, the possibility for their further development to occur under a different pattern of human interdependence.<sup>224</sup>

In this manner, and following from what we already argued in the first section of this chapter, Marx's non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation not only appears more adequate than that found in Kant's work to the extent that it is better able to connect to the empirical and historical process of human development, but also because it gathers the immanent potential for a multi-linear and open-ended model of the species' history. Even if this potential is not actualised in Marx's work given how his non-transcendental approach is framed in a linear and teleological theory of history that reproduces the modernist forms of myth that also affect Kant's critical theory, it opens the way for a historically-embedded assessment of the conditions of human freedom which, by being oriented to the empirical circumstances of human beings at each particular historical juncture, is in principle capable of encompassing different paths of human development and their open-ended character in a more comprehensive grand narrative of the species' history. As such, we can argue that in light of our engagement with the problem of orientation, Marx's non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation, if framed in a more adequate explanatory model of human development than Marx's theory of history,

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<sup>224</sup> There is thus no fixed, universal conception of human nature or essence that provides Marx with a universal standard of the 'good' and allows him to distinguish, for example, between true and false needs or true and false self, and through which existing societies can be evaluated according with their degree of actualization of this ideal. Such a position has been held by some Marxist humanists in an attempt to distance Marx from the more mechanistic interpretations of his work. However, while the Marxist humanists have been of great importance in salvaging Marx's work from its more reductionist interpretations, still, in light of the reading provided in this chapter, their position suffers from a fundamental problem. By arguing that Marx possesses a universal conception of human essence they, in effect, return to a type of transcendental and universalistic means of orientation such as the one we find in Kant. Hence, they ignore Marx's innovations in relation to Kant, namely the historicization of the notion of human nature that understands both the human capacity for freedom and human needs as phenomena that develop and assume different expressions throughout history. The only human 'essence' that Marx admits is a capacity to undergo historical change. For a discussion of true and false needs in Marx's work see: Fromm, E. *Marx's Concept of Man* or Marcuse, H. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London, Routledge, 2002). For a discussion of true and false self, see: Fromm, E. *Escape from Freedom* (New York, Henry Holt, 1995). For a defence of Marx's universal conception of human essence and good, see: Kamenka, E. *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (London, Routledge, 1972). For a discussion of this topic closer to the interpretation advanced in this chapter see: Sayers, S. *Marxism and Human Nature* (New York, Routledge, 2007).

points us in the direction of how to produce a means of orientation that exhibits a more adequate involvement–detachment balance. In other words, a means of orientation which is simultaneously capable of providing a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition, which is more detached from ethnocentric and parochial points of view, and which permits a secondary re-involvement oriented to an historically-embedded assessment of the conditions for human self-determination which have been gathered at each historical juncture and in the context of particular and diverse developmental processes whose global interweaving increasingly binds together all members of the species.

However, as we already argued above, Marx's theory of history blocks his capacity to provide this more comprehensive grand narrative of human development. As this section has shown, his dialectical analysis is based on a linear conception that derives from his focus on the causal role of human productive activity in the development of the human conditions of existence and of people's perspectives and modes of attunement towards each other and the world. The inadequacy of Marx's theory of history as a means of orientation is clearly expressed in the above exposition of his argument regarding the more universal character of each new revolutionary class throughout history. While Marx's observations highlight the role that human control over nature and the material conditions of human existence have in the universalisation and greater detachment of people's perspectives, he establishes a too direct causal link between the two, ignoring how the emergence of more cosmopolitan orientations and modes of mutual attunement between people is also necessarily caught up with other social processes such as the development of people's self-control over internal human nature or the patterns of development of inter-state competition and war. By disregarding these dynamics in his theory of history, Marx falls back upon a linear and tendentially teleological conception of human development which not only is inadequate as a means of orientation but reproduces a form of modernist grand narrative that hides, under the cover of his supposed cosmopolitanism, a highly involved and Western-centric perspective. As the next section shows, this tension between the immanent potential in Marx's work for a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition and his linear theory of history is particularly evident in his critique of capitalism.



### **3. The dialectic of capitalism**

In this section, we discuss Marx's critique of capitalism and show how it expresses both the strengths and the limitations of Marx's work as an answer to the problem of orientation. Our main focus is on how Marx's explanatory analysis of the predominant dynamics shaping the capitalist stage of social development informs his anticipatory assessment of the immanent potential it gathers for a radical expansion of the human powers of conscious control over nature and the global networks of human interdependence. In this context, we observe that Marx's critique of capitalism promotes a more cosmopolitan orientation on the basis of which people can better attune to each other on a species-wide scale and develop forms of mutual empathy which overcome particularistic points of view and which Marx considers to be fundamental for human beings to more consciously navigate the future stages of the global integration of the species and reduce the exploitative and demeaning character of their social bonds. However, we also argue that Marx's linear theory of history – based on a direct causal connection between the expansion of human control over nature and the universalisation of people's perspectives – actually throws his analysis of capitalism back upon a more involved perspective which proves to be more society and time bound than what Marx anticipates. As we argue throughout this section, this is particularly evident in Marx's usage of the concept civilisation in this context. Similarly to Kant, Marx shifts between a more static and a more processual conception of civilisation, however, unlike Kant, the latter understanding of the concept tends to predominate. As such, Marx conceives of civilisation predominantly as being connected with a specific stage of human development, when human productive activity, technological development, and cosmopolitan orientations have attained a certain level of expression. In the absence of a more detached and technical usage of the concept – and even though Marx does not characterise capitalism as the pinnacle of civilisation – there is an inherent distinction in Marx's work between the 'barbaric' peoples who have not yet reached the capitalist stage of development and the 'civilised' Western capitalist nations. Marx's discussion of civilisation in his critique of capitalism thus clearly expresses the involved and Western-centric perspective to which his linear theory of history leads him and how, immanent in it,

is a legitimization of practices of domination and exclusion of alternative paths of human development and self-expression.<sup>225</sup>

For the purpose of clarity our analysis is divided into two subsections. First, we address the connection between capitalist development and the expansion of the human powers of control over their metabolism with nature, and second, we address its connection with the development of human control over social processes and the networks of interdependence of globalised humanity.

### **3.1. The conscious control of the human natural metabolism**

As Marx notes in the '*Grundrisse*', one of the defining features of capitalism as a specific form of organization of human production and social intercourse is that it 'posits the production of wealth itself, and hence the universal development of the productive forces, (...) as the presupposition of its reproduction'.<sup>226</sup> Capitalism's wealth appears in the form of a constant process of accumulation of capital, a process which is expressed in the continuous search, on the part of the bourgeois class, to expand both productive capacity and commercial intercourse throughout the globe, selling products on the world market at a profit which is then turned into capital by being reinvested into the productive process in order to generate yet further capital. According to Marx, three historical conditions are essential to ensure the continued reproduction of capitalism. First, the class of proletarians needs to be socially compelled to engage in productive activity, with workers selling their labour-power in exchange of a wage which is then used to buy the products for the satisfaction of their historically developing needs on the world market. Second, the productive process itself needs to be characterized by the constant development of the forces of production, so that an increased proliferation of products is produced in less time and with lower cost. And third, the world market needs to be constantly expanding, creating increasingly wider and more interdependent webs of production and trade throughout the

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<sup>225</sup> Marx's work can be said to express what Michael Adas identified as conceptions of civilisation that by linking it with a certain stage of technological and scientific have underlined 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries ideologies of Western dominance. See: Adas, M. *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology and the Ideologies of Western Dominance* (London, Cornell University Press, 2015) and Adas, M. 'Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilising Mission Ideology', *Journal of World History*, 15: 1 (2004) pp. 31-63.

<sup>226</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 541.

globe, which simultaneously respond to, and develop, human needs for the objects of an increasingly multi-sided, specialized and multifarious social production. This constant capitalist urge for the development of the forces of production is expressed in the 'universal appropriation of nature' and in the use of science in order to discover 'new things of use as well as new useful qualities of the old'.<sup>227</sup>

As such, capitalism implies a radical universalisation of human relations with nature, marked by its multi-sided exploration and transformation, accompanied by a growing division of labour and the industrialization of productive activity. The human natural metabolism is laid open to a greater degree of conscious regulation through the development of the natural sciences and technology as well as of increasingly more specialized tools and industrial processes, which 'reveal the great civilising influence of capital'.<sup>228</sup> This influence is further expressed by the fact that capitalism develops the general industriousness of the proletariat by locking the satisfaction of people's needs to the sale of their labour-power and their engagement in the productive process of society. As such, capitalism develops not only the technological side but also the human side of the productive forces, as it 'incessantly whips labour onward with its unlimited mania for wealth (...) driving it beyond the limits of its natural paltriness'.<sup>229</sup>

Furthermore, Marx's analysis of the main dynamics shaping the capitalist stage of human development also leads him to argue that, by requiring the constant development of the forces of production for its reproduction, capitalism implies not only a radical historical growth of the human powers of control over nature but also gathers the potential for a fundamental transformation of the human condition, characterised by a more conscious regulation of the human natural metabolism and by the future possibility of diminishing the condition of scarcity and limited productive capacity which has defined the long-term history of the species on the planet. As he observes, one of the main expression of the civilising thrust of capital is its ever growing division of labour that 'gradually transforms the worker's operations into more and more mechanical ones, so that at a certain point a mechanism can step into their place'.<sup>230</sup> Hence, what was the living worker's activity

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<sup>227</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 409.

<sup>228</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 410.

<sup>229</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 325.

<sup>230</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 704.

‘becomes the activity of the machine’.<sup>231</sup> The worker effectively ‘inserts the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between him and inorganic nature, mastering it, (...) he steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor’.<sup>232</sup> By directing and integrating natural processes into the production process, humans collectively acquire a greater degree of control over their metabolism with nature.

However, the most radical innovation of this development is that they not only exponentially increase their productive capacity, but also open up the possibility for the progressive automation of the production process, with significant implications. On the one hand, the role of individuals in the production process progressively shifts from direct labour in the transformation of nature to assume a more ‘supervisory and regulatory role’, implying predominantly the development of the ‘powers of the human head’, i.e. the development of scientific knowledge in all of its dimensions and its application to new technology.<sup>233</sup> On the other hand, labour changes not only qualitatively but also quantitatively. As the human forces of production grow, and the scientific appropriation of nature into the production process becomes more prevalent and expressed in the growing automation of industry, so too the amount of necessary labour on the part of each worker, required for the satisfaction of society’s ever expanding needs, diminishes.<sup>234</sup> Capitalism thus creates the possibility for a radical diminution of the labour time individuals have to dedicate daily not only to the reproduction, but also to the development, of their conditions of existence. With the historical emergence of large industry, the creation of ‘real wealth’ – not measured in capital but rather in the proliferation of products for the satisfaction of human needs – comes to ‘depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed, than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose effectiveness (...) depends on the general state of science and (...) technology, and their application (...) to production’.<sup>235</sup> It is thus one ‘of the civilising aspects of capital that it (...) creates the material means and the nucleus for relations that permit (...) a greater reduction of the overall time devoted to material labour’.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 704.

<sup>232</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 705.

<sup>233</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 709.

<sup>234</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 700.

<sup>235</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 704.

<sup>236</sup> Marx, K. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3 (London, Penguin Books, 1991), p. 958. According to Marx, the reduction of each day’s necessary labour would liberate people to engage in free labour in their free

As such, according to Marx, capitalism gathers the historical conditions for a radical expansion of human self-determination expressed in the universalisation of people's relations with nature and in the development of their capacity to consciously control their natural metabolism in a manner that guarantees both the growth of human productive powers and the possibility of reducing the time that people have to dedicate directly to the activity of labour in order to satisfy their needs, even under conditions of historically expanding societal needs. As Marx argues, and it is worth quoting at length,

'the real realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his needs, (...) so must civilised man, and he must do so in all forms of society under all possible modes of production. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. Freedom, in this sphere, can only consist in (...) governing the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control (...) accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins only beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. The reduction off the working day is the basic prerequisite'.<sup>237</sup>

However, in keeping with his dialectical conception of human historical development, Marx also observes that although capitalism holds the immanent potential for a radical expansion of freedom, it also comes to historically deny its full actualization. In particular, Marx argues that as the productive capacity of society becomes more and more disproportionate in relation to the amount of labour that needs to be input in the production process, the need to labour for long hours is significantly reduced for a part of the population given the growing automation of industry. However, since capitalism presupposes the intermediation of money – in the form of a wage paid in exchange of proletarians selling their labour-power to the bourgeois class to access the products of social labour being sold on the world market

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time, i.e. in self-determined conscious activity envisioning their self-development and creative self-expression. At the same time, the automation of the production process would also imply the qualitative transformation of necessary labour itself, turning it from the exhausting, repetitive and one-sided activity that it is under the high division of labour established by capitalism, into labour with a fundamentally scientific character, focused on the development of individuals' intellect and knowledge. This interpretation of Marx's position supersedes the debate between those authors that interpret Marx as intending to diminish labour and those who prefer to read Marx's position as entailing the defence of a more humane and self-expressive form of labour. Both of these interpretations are valid and are inherently implied in the future organisation of a post-capitalist society that actualizes the civilisational potential historically gathered by capitalism. For a position arguing for a reduction of labour-time, see: Gorz, A. *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005). For a position defending labour as a self-expressive activity, see: Sayers, S. 'Why Work? Marx and Human Nature', *Science & Society*, 69: 4 (2005) pp. 606-616.

<sup>237</sup> Marx, K. *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 959.

– the reduction of labour time, instead of posing the emancipation of individuals, implies the reduction of their means of interchange to access the products that satisfy their needs.<sup>238</sup> As such, while capitalism poses potential universal abundance and growth of free time, the social relations of production on which it stands imply that these civilisational achievements turn into their opposite, i.e. the pauperisation of the proletarians and the perception of free time as a curse instead of a liberation.<sup>239</sup>

According to Marx, capitalism cannot avoid this dialectical contradiction. Avoiding it would imply the supersession of the wage-form tied to labour time as the dominant mode of regulation of the access to the products of social labour. Capitalism cannot achieve such supersession given that the constant accumulation of capital is fundamentally dependent on continuously selling an increasing abundance of privatised products to the proletarians. And while each individual capitalist may wish that all the other capitalists pay better wages and employ increasing numbers of people – and thus create the social conditions for the sale of his or her products – each capitalist's accumulation of capital is also dependent on the reduction of his or her own production costs, which is achieved through the development of the forces of production so as to shorten the amount of labour required and thus the amount of wages paid. Consequently, as a social class, the bourgeoisie constantly strives to attain two contradictory goals. On the one hand, the further development of the forces of production and the reduction of labour time and, on the other hand, the simultaneous increase of social consumption mediated by the wage-form. As Marx observes, capitalism is

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<sup>238</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 693.

<sup>239</sup> Also important to note in this context is Marx's analysis of the dialectical development of the division of labour. As mentioned above, Marx associates its development with the increase of human interdependence and the universality of human relations with nature and society. However, in his analysis of capitalism Marx observes that, by developing the division of labour to a far greater extent than any previous mode of production, capitalism increasingly circumscribes and mechanises workers' activities. Their labour becomes increasingly particularistic and reduced to small, repetitive tasks that turn them into mere 'appendages of machines' and remove any creative or self-expressive character from the activity of labour. As such, the division of labour becomes a negation of labour itself as a form of conscious activity. However, by creating the scientific, technological and social potential for the automation of industrial production, capitalism also produces the historical conditions to overcome this situation. The actualization of the automation of production and the transformation of the worker into a scientific supervisor of the production process effectively allows a diminution of the division of labour at a higher stage of productive capacity. Hence, the dialectical movement of the division of labour creates the immanent potential for its future supersession, while ensuring the preservation of the historical growth of the universality of intercourse it has produced. See: Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 693-695.

a 'moving contradiction in that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as the sole measure and source of wealth'.<sup>240</sup>

The dialectic of the capitalist stage of human development is thus expressed in the fact that 'all the progress of civilisation' – in Marx's more involved sense – 'such as results from science, inventions, division and combination of labour, improved means of communication, creation of the world market, machinery etc., enriches not the worker but rather capital'.<sup>241</sup> Being the social measuring rod of wealth, capital subsumes everything to its single-minded quest for growth. The development of the forces of production, the scientific control of nature, and human beings themselves, all become means for the ultimate end of capital. As Marx argues, human relations are thus inverted, as the subjects of history – people – become merely the means for the growth of the objects they themselves have created and the social forces they have unleashed; i.e. capital and the capitalist mode of social and productive organization. Under capitalism, the whole development of civilisation proceeds 'in a contradictory way' in that the growth of the productive forces, of general wealth and knowledge, appear in such a way that individuals relate to them not as 'their own' but as an 'alien' force.<sup>242</sup>

According to Marx, capitalism thus comes to eventually pose itself as a historical barrier to the actualisation of the immanent potential it has created for the further development of human self-determination. The need to continuously tie the growth of capital to wage-labour, and the prevalence of competitive relations between capitalists and between workers in the process of social production, implies not only that developments such as the automation of industry cannot occur beyond a certain point on risk of disrupting the whole mode of social and productive organization founded on capital, but also that important technological and scientific innovations, whose very character makes them incapable of being subsumed to capitalist relations, end up not being developed. As such, beyond a certain stage, Marx argues, 'capital, i.e. wage labour, enters into the same historical relation towards the development of social wealth and the forces of production as

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<sup>240</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 706.

<sup>241</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 308.

<sup>242</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 541. Such inversion between subject and object in which the things produced by humans becomes alien determining forces over them constitutes the essence of Marx's notion of 'alienation', a philosophical concept that permeates Marx's thought and, despite the concept being dropped in his later work, continues to inform his overall understanding of human beings' lack of control over their conditions of existence. For an analysis of Marx's concept of alienation, see: Mészáros, I. *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London, Merlin Press, 1970).

the guild system, serfdom and slavery'.<sup>243</sup> It shows itself to be a 'barrier', a 'fetter' and that it 'is becoming senile and has further and further outlived its epoch'.<sup>244</sup>

By addressing Marx's critique of capitalism in what regards human relations with non-human nature from the perspective of our inquiry into the problem of orientation we can argue that it constitutes an attempt at providing an orientating framework on the basis of which people might better understand the connection between the development of capitalism and that of their capacity to more consciously control their metabolism with external nature. As such, when read as a means of orientation, Marx's analysis of capitalism shows itself capable of simultaneously, and on the same normative basis, orientating people towards supporting the development of capitalism or towards calling for its abolition, in accordance with the historical point of view from which they are making their anticipatory assessment of the conditions for the expansion of the human powers of conscious control. From the point of view of a stage of human development characterised by an absence of industrial production and the natural sciences, the development of capitalism appears to be highly emancipatory in what concerns people's relations with nature, expanding the human powers of self-determination over their natural conditions of existence. On the other hand, from the point of view of a stage of human development in which capitalism is becoming a barrier to the further automation of industry and to a more conscious regulation of the human natural metabolism, the same normative commitment to the expansion of human self-determination leads Marx to orientate people towards the abolition of capitalism and its substitution with a mode of social production which is more adequate for the actualisation of the immanent potential that capitalism has gathered for the further development of the human powers of conscious control. The non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation which can be found in Marx's work thus expresses a more adequate involvement-detachment balance in its perspective of the conditions of existence of globalised humanity. It does so to the extent that, on the one hand, it provides a more detached and less time-bound assessment of the conditions of human freedom – by understanding it as part of a long-term developmental process – and, on the other hand, it is based on a historically-embedded assessment of the immanent potential that each

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<sup>243</sup> Marx, K., *Grundrisse*, p. 541.

<sup>244</sup> Marx, K. *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 371.



particular moment in the history of the species has gathered for the further development of human self-determination.

However, as we argue in the next subsection, the adequacy of Marx's answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation in what regards human relations with non-human nature comes to be undermined by his linear theory of history and the way in which it conceives of the connection between capitalism and the development of human control over social processes.

### **3.2. The global self-determination of the species**

As mentioned in section two, Marx considers that the predominant direction in the history of the species has been towards the growth of the universality of human intercourse accompanying the development of the division of labour, a process which, according to Marx, reaches a truly global character under capitalism. In this context, we can argue that Marx's analysis of the universalisation of human relations and perspectives under capitalism is particularly evident of the limitations of his linear theory of history and its inadequacy as a means of orientation. In particular, its theoretically established linear and causal connection between the development of human control over nature and the universalisation of individual orientations leads Marx to consider that the globalisation of the capitalist mode of production, by reproducing the same material conditions of existence across the whole species, also reproduces globally the same basic patterns of social relations and individual identities, perspectives and forms of attunement between people. This linear and homogenising conception of capitalist globalisation becomes particularly evident in Marx's usage of the concept of civilisation. While Marx's assertion that capitalism brings the whole species under a global civilising process might strike a correct note, his more involved conception of the term leads him to characterise that global civilising process as entailing the reproduction, on a species-wide scale, of the basic pattern of Western civilisation in a manner that tramples all previous, localised, and less developed forms of human self-expression.

This is evident in Marx's argument in *'The Communist Manifesto'* that the improvement of the means of production and communication under capitalism has enabled the conquest of space and time and brought the whole species, 'even the most barbarian

nations, into civilisation'.<sup>245</sup> Capitalism, in keeping with its conditions of reproduction 'tears down every spatial barrier to intercourse and conquers the whole Earth for its market'.<sup>246</sup> In the process, it 'batters down all Chinese walls' and forces all particular, self-contained expressions of humanity to 'capitulate' and to adopt, 'on pain of extinction' the capitalist mode of production.<sup>247</sup> It thus 'creates a world after its own image' and reproduces, globally, the same conditions of existence that are verified in its place of birth, Western Europe.<sup>248</sup> According to Marx, the subsumption of the whole species under a single global civilisation is an inherently dialectical process. On the one hand, it entails extreme violence, as large sections of humanity are brutally colonized and forced to integrate the global market and feed capital's growth. Previously self-contained modes of life are disrupted and outright destroyed, as all human societies are forcefully subsumed under the capitalist mode of production and social organisation. Millions of human beings are victims of dislocations, exploitation and domination as they are integrated into the global market as colonized subjects, either directly by Western colonial powers or indirectly, by seeing their patterns of life reshaped according to capitalist standards.<sup>249</sup> However, on the other hand, by producing world spanning webs of human interdependence, and integrating the whole species in a single global civilisation, capitalism also produces the conditions for further civilisational development and the expansion of human self-determination. In particular, Marx notes that the universality of human intercourse brought about by capitalism and structured by the world market establishes the historical basis for the emergence of world-historical individuals, human beings whose perspectives of the world and personal attunement towards other people assume a truly cosmopolitan character.<sup>250</sup>

In this context, Marx argues that the world market and the global networks of production, trade and consumption it establishes between industrial communities of proletarians in different countries, generates a material bond between each individual worker and the whole species in a manner that cultivates, amongst the workers of the world, an hitherto unknown cosmopolitan orientation towards the human condition and

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<sup>245</sup> Marx, K. 'The Communist Manifesto', p. 249.

<sup>246</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 539.

<sup>247</sup> Marx, K. 'The Communist Manifesto', p. 249.

<sup>248</sup> Marx, K. 'The Communist Manifesto', p. 249.

<sup>249</sup> As Linklater observes, according to Marx, capitalism releases people from feudal personal relations of dependence only to substitute them by forms of impersonal dependence on uncontrolled social forces. See: Linklater, A. *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, p. 37.

<sup>250</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 542.

powers of production.<sup>251</sup> In Marx's view, the historical emergence of a truly cosmopolitan outlook amongst the most dispossessed and exploited individuals in the class structure of world capitalist society constitutes the basis for the formation of bonds of solidarity and mutual identification based on common humanity rather than on membership of particularistic communities.<sup>252</sup>

However, from the perspective of our inquiry, Marx's argument in this regard can be said to imply too quick a connection between the globalisation of the material conditions of human existence and the universalisation of people's perspectives and modes of attunement. His predominant dismissal of the role of social processes such as state formation and world politics in the development of capitalism itself and of people's personal identities and forms of orientation leads Marx to a conception of the human conditions of existence under capitalism which is inadequate as a means of orientation. On the one hand, from the point of view of the explanatory dimension of orientation, it ignores the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development and the multiple expressions that capitalism can assume in different cultural and societal contexts under the influence of different processes of formation of political community, of different forms of linguistically established legal regulation of human interdependence and of different patterns of inter-societal relations of cooperation and conflict. On the other hand, from the point of view of the anticipatory dimension of orientation, it is inadequate in so far as it leads Marx to a diagnosis of the immanent potential that capitalism has gathered for the further development of the human powers of control which, by ignoring the fundamental plurality of humankind, opens the way for the historical emergence of new forms of domination and exclusion in the name of cosmopolitanism and the emancipation of the species.

This latter aspect becomes particularly evident in Marx's analysis of the dialectical relation between capitalism and the development of the human capacity to bring social processes under greater collective and conscious control. According to Marx, in keeping with its dialectical character, all of the civilising developments that capitalism produces in terms of the universalisation of the human social bond appear to the people caught up in them as not their own doing, but as an alien power that determines their existence. The proletarians' global cooperative production, by assuming the form of a forced subsumption

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<sup>251</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 409.

<sup>252</sup> Marx, K. *Grundrisse*, p. 287.

to the interest of capital accumulation, does not appear as ‘their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside them, of the origin and goal of which they are ignorant’.<sup>253</sup> The first world-historical individuals are thus unable to control their own conditions of existence and direct their global co-operation to the satisfaction of human needs and the reduction of necessary labour time. Instead, the ‘broadening’ of human activity into world-historical activity becomes ‘more and more enslaved under (...) a power which has become more and more enormous and, in the last instance turns out to be the world market’.<sup>254</sup> As such, capitalism despite gathering, for the first time in history, the material, social and subjective conditions for the development of a global civilisation based on human co-operation and solidarity, which would enable people everywhere, united as a species, to more consciously control their social development and the future conditions of human existence on Earth, also ultimately denies the actualisation of this potential for human self-determination.

This profound dialectical contradiction of capitalism, between the historical potential it gathers for the radical expansion of human self-determination and the barrier it constitutes to its actualisation, ‘sets existing individuals a very definitive task’, that of seizing the immanent potentials with which capitalism is ‘pregnant’ in order to ‘replace the domination of circumstances and chance over individuals by the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances’.<sup>255</sup> The actualisation of this immanent potential, Marx observes, will not come about automatically by the natural development of capitalist relations. Instead, it demands the conscious and collective appropriation of the universal social bond and the planned transformation of capitalism into the next higher stage of civilisation, variously described by Marx as ‘socialism’ or ‘communism’.<sup>256</sup> Essential in this

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<sup>253</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 53.

<sup>254</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 59. In Linklater’s view, capitalism creates ‘seemingly unprecedented’ opportunities for the expression of the full range of human powers and for bringing about an extraordinary increase in the level of human control over nature, only to place individuals ‘at the mercy’ of international market forces which they are powerless to control. Linklater, A. *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, p. 43.

<sup>255</sup> Marx, K. Engels, F. *The German Ideology*, p. 463.

<sup>256</sup> According to Avineri, successful historical revolution depends on the combination of both a stage of development of the forces of production and a stage of universality of class consciousness that enables the historical constitution of a class capable of carrying out a successful reconfiguration of human social intercourse. See: Avineri, S. *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, p. 144. Furthermore, as Linklater notes, the cyclical crisis of capitalism play a fundamental role in the formation of this class consciousness since they expose how capitalism’s language of freedom and equality actually disguises the deeper reality of class exploitation. See: Linklater, A. *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, p. 43.

context is the conscious 'transformation of capital back into the property of the producers, though no longer as the private property of individual producers, but rather as their property as associated producers, as direct social property'.<sup>257</sup> Only in this manner, argues Marx, can wage-labour be abolished and, with it, the class relations that give capitalism its contradictory character. Such transformation implies a revolution in human being's relations with nature and with one another, both as individuals and as members of the human species; a revolution which, in Marx's view, can only be brought about by the truly world-historical individuals emerging out of the capitalist process of production, the proletarians. Only proletarians, as a social class, gather both the objective and subjective conditions to carry this revolution forth, given their truly cosmopolitan character as a consequence of the deep interdependence of both their productive activity and their conditions of life with the global social bond of the species.

However, despite Marx's grand vision of a global proletarian revolution ushering the species into a global civilisation based on universal empathy, the diminution of scarcity and a more conscious regulation of the human natural metabolism, when addressed from the perspective of our engagement with the problem of orientation this vision also appears highly problematic. Despite Marx's analysis of capitalism clearly striving for a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition which can better attune people to both the reality and the potential of their global interdependence, his reliance on a linear theory of history actually leads him to fall back upon a more involved perspective which remains locked in the historical point of view of Western modernity. In particular, by ignoring the role of the monopolisation of force by the state and of inter-societal relations in the development of capitalism and in the long-term history of the species, Marx remains incapable of capturing the multiple potential paths of human development and of recognising the fundamental diversity of humankind and of people's modes of existence and orientation, even when sharing the global conditions of interdependence brought about by the capitalist world market. Marx thus advances a set of false assumptions regarding how the similarity of material conditions of existence across the world to those of the oldest capitalist nations also means that the perspectives and modes of orientation of people belonging to the class of proletarians is the same everywhere. In this manner, Marx elevates

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<sup>257</sup> Marx, K. *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 569.

the Western-centric world-views of the proletarians of the Western nations to a condition of universality, as representative of a truly human and cosmopolitan perspective shared by all human beings occupying the same position in the global networks of capitalist interdependence. A confusion that leads Marx's work to inherently legitimise practices of exclusion of difference and domination over non-Western modes of human self-expression in the name of the supposedly universal orientation of the Western proletariat and its historical role to bring about world proletarian revolution and the cosmopolitan future of the species. As such, and as we argue in greater depth in the next section, our reading of Marx's work and his critique of capitalism clearly indicates that while it holds the potential for a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation, this potential is also ultimately frustrated and substituted by a linear grand narrative that ultimately reveals Marx's more involved and Western-centric perspective.

#### **4. The plurality of the human condition**

Throughout this chapter we have argued that Marx's materialist and emergentist approach to the long-term process of human development opens the way to a non-transcendental, multi-linear and open-ended answer to the problem of orientation which would prove to be more adequate and less prone to the reproduction of modernist myths than Kant's critical approach. However, we also noted that the same materialist approach which gathers this potential in Marx's work, ultimately denies his capacity to actualise it, given how it leads Marx to over-focus on human productive activity and give it causal primacy in a linear theory of the history of the species. In this section, we return to this argument in light of Benhabib's, Andrew Davenport's and Linklater's comments on Marx's work. These authors' analyses enable us to support our argument that a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation needs to build upon Marx's work and combine its main strengths with the Kantian themes that the previous chapter identified as fundamental in the attainment of a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition. In particular, it needs to fulfil three main objectives. First, it needs to retain Marx's numerous insights regarding the role of human control over external nature in the long-term process of human development, as well as his historically-embedded and processual assessment of the conditions of human freedom. Second, it needs to combine these Marxian themes with a Kantian assessment of

the role of human self-control over internal human nature, as well as the role of the linguistic consensualization of social norms, of state formation and of world politics in the development of people's perspectives and basic modes of attunement towards each other and the world. And third, it needs to combine these two perspectives on the basis of a multi-linear and open-ended model of the species' history, which provides a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay of the triad of basic controls in its context, and thus avoids both of these authors' linear and teleological conceptions of human development and their inherent reproduction of modernist grand narratives.

Moving on to our analysis of these authors' critiques of Marx's work, we can argue that Benhabib points to the fundamental problem of Marx's critical approach when read as an answer to the problem of orientation. According to Benhabib, Marx's work embodies what she describes as a 'philosophy of the subject', which entails four main conceptions. First, it poses a unitary model of human activity; second, it understands history as constituted by the activities of a unitary subject; third, it views history as the unfolding of the capacities of this subject; and fourth, it implies a conception of human self-determination as this subject's 'coming to consciousness'.<sup>258</sup> As Benhabib observes, these four aspects of the philosophy of the subject are evident in Marx's assumption that the emancipation of the proletariat expresses the emancipation of humankind itself, given how 'the specific interests of this class correspond to the universal interests of humanity'.<sup>259</sup> However, Benhabib argues that the underlying assumptions supporting Marx's argument are 'faulty'.<sup>260</sup>

In her view, Marx's claim that there is a subject of history to whom we can ascribe collective interests rests on a confusion of empirical and normative categories.<sup>261</sup> It is a result of the theoretical equivalence that Marx establishes between, on the one hand, his empirical identification of the historical emergence of humanity as a unit of social analysis – given the growing global interdependence of all human beings and societies – and, on the other hand, his normative assumption that human global interdependence represents the emergence of truly human and worldwide forms of solidarity and orientation. As we saw above, it derives from Marx's assessment that human beings enmeshed in these global

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<sup>258</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 129.

<sup>259</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 130.

<sup>260</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 130.

<sup>261</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 130.

webs of interdependence brought about by capitalism are subject to the same material conditions of existence everywhere, and thus necessarily develop increasingly more universal perspectives and form universal bonds of mutual identification which encompass all the other members of the species.

In this context, Benhabib shares our assessment that this is a flawed theoretical equivalence which rests on Marx's establishment of a direct causal connection between the material conditions of human existence and the development of human identities and basic forms of orientation in the world; a connection which, Benhabib argues, arises from Marx's 'focus on work' as the main expression of human historical activity. It is her argument that Marx's conception of work is a 'monological one' which 'privileges the subject-object relations and abstracts from the dimension of subject-subject relations and from the social context of action'.<sup>262</sup> While Marx recognises the inherently social character of labour, his focus on the material dimension of labouring activity leads him to ignore the extent to which human actions, perspectives and basic modes of orientation are 'linguistically mediated' insofar as 'not only are what we as agents see as our purposes or wishes in the world linguistically formulated, but (...) others can understand what we do and who we are [only] insofar as our actions can be retold by them as a story, as a narrative'.<sup>263</sup> Human conditions of existence are thus constituted not only by the material circumstances of the species, but also by the 'web of interpretations' that shapes human perspectives at any given moment.<sup>264</sup>

As such, in Benhabib's assessment, Marx's over-focus on a model of work which ignores this linguistic dimension of the human condition leads him 'away from a politics of intersubjectivity to a politics of collective singularity' and to the assumption that a single class can act as the representative of the collective, singular entity 'humanity'.<sup>265</sup> Marx's critical approach leads him to 'deny human plurality' and how human interests do not arise from a singular collectivity of mind, shared by the whole species, but rather from the intermeshing and deliberative consensualization of what 'struggling social actors themselves come to recognise as their own common goals and desires'.<sup>266</sup> From such a point of view, no

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<sup>262</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 135.

<sup>263</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 136.

<sup>264</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 136.

<sup>265</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 351.

<sup>266</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 131.



social class can ever be understood as representing a truly universal interest or perspective. As Benhabib concludes, Marx's over-emphasis on human productive activity, to the detriment of the role of language in human identity formation and modes of orientation, leads him to conceptually 'shift from the plural to the collectively singular, from humans to humanity'.<sup>267</sup> In this manner, his conception of human historical development as the actualisation of the human powers of self-determination comes to refer not to the actualisation of human beings' capacity to more consciously and collectively control their conditions of existence in a manner which recognises the multiple forms of human self-expression, but rather entails a conception in which history is the actualisation of a unitary model of human existence, and where a specific conception of humanity is understood as the 'goal' or the 'telos' of the long-term process of human historical development.<sup>268</sup>

Benhabib's critique not only echoes our arguments regarding the shortcomings of Marx's work, but can also be seen to support our assessment of how a more adequate means of orientation has to encompass an analysis of the role of state formation and world politics in the history of the species. Her argument regarding Marx's lack of awareness of how human perspectives and collective interests depend both on the material conditions of human existence and on the clash between the different points of view of struggling actors enmeshed in a 'web of interpretations' takes us to a consideration of how this web is composed by people who are members of self-regarding political communities and structured by cross-border encounters and conflicts between them. It points us to the argument that the plurality of the human condition depends also on the long-term developmental patterns of world politics and the way processes of state formation and war have shaped both the development of capitalism and of more or less cosmopolitan modes of orientation at the level of people's personality structures.

As Davenport notes, in the absence of a study of world politics, Marx remains incapable of conceiving how humanity 'has always been divided into, and organised itself into, communities, of one sort or another, that are inherently limited and pluralistic, creating group identities, insiders and outsiders, friends and enemies, countrymen and

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<sup>267</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 131.

<sup>268</sup> Benhabib, S. *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 131.

foreigners'.<sup>269</sup> As such, Marx's conception of unified humanity becoming the subject of history with the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism at the hands of truly universal human beings embodied in the proletariat of each nation constantly loses sight of the perennial condition of human multiplicity, and its consequences in terms of people's capacity for global co-ordination and the self-determination of the species.<sup>270</sup> It leads, according to Linklater, to an 'ossified' vision of universal socialism and to a conception of the rise and fall of modes of production which 'largely ignores' non-class-based modes of exclusion and leaves 'unanswered' important questions regarding the future role of the state and the institutions of international society in addressing the 'tenacity' of nationalism and war.<sup>271</sup> As such, Linklater argues, Marxism 'fails as a critical theory because it believes that reconstructing property relations is tantamount to transforming political community'.<sup>272</sup> A more adequate approach thus requires the recognition that what Marx regards as the 'central axis' of human development is just 'one instance of a broader phenomenon'.<sup>273</sup>

From the perspective of our inquiry, Benhabib, Davenport and Linklater's comments on Marx's work point to fundamental shortcomings in the adequacy of his theoretical framework as a means of orientation. They show that, despite the potential that Marx's materialist and emergentist approach gathers for the development of a multi-linear and open-ended model of human development, his conceptual over-emphasis on human productive activity and control over nature throws him back upon a linear and tendentially teleological conception of the history of the species. In this manner, Marx not only fails to actualise the immanent potential in his critical approach for a more cosmopolitan grand narrative, but actually reproduces the same type of modernist myth which undermines the adequacy of Kant's work as a means of orientation. By producing a unitary model of human development which leads to the assumption that a global civilising process brought about by capitalism effectively abolishes human difference and reproduces the same conditions of existence everywhere on the planet, Marx not only ignores the diversity of the species and how, even under of global interdependence, human self-expression is multiple and varied,

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<sup>269</sup> Davenport, A. 'Marxism in IR: Condemned to a Realist Fate?', *European Journal of International Relations*, 19: 1 (2011) p.31.

<sup>270</sup> Davenport, A. 'Marxism in IR', p. 31.

<sup>271</sup> Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 39.

<sup>272</sup> Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 116.

<sup>273</sup> Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 116.

but he does so in a way that inherently legitimizes practices of domination, exclusion and violence envisioning the elimination of difference in the name of humanity.

## **Conclusion**

Our discussion of Marx's work as an answer to the problem of orientation has led us to several conclusions. It highlighted how Marx's materialist and emergentist approach to human development gathers the potential for a more adequate answer to both dimensions of orientation in so far as it enables an anticipatory, non-transcendental, historically-embedded and processual assessment of the conditions of human self-determination and opens the way for an explanatory model of human history which captures its multi-linear and open-ended character. As we have argued throughout the chapter, a theoretical framework which actualises this potential would be able to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition on the basis of which people might more adequately orientate themselves in acquiring a better understanding of their conditions of existence and how to exercise a greater degree of conscious and collective control over them.

However, our analysis of Marx's work has also highlighted several shortcomings which are instructive for our inquiry. In particular, it has shown the inadequacy of the establishment of relations of causal linearity as an explanatory framework regarding the long-term process of human development. In Marx's case, this becomes evident through an assessment of the extent to which his theoretical focus on human productive activity and control over nature leads him to establish too quick and direct a connection with changes occurring at the level of people's personality structures, and basic perspectives of the world and forms of mutual identification. In the process, Marx ignores the concomitant role that social phenomena such as the development of human self-control, the linguistic consensualization of social norms regulating human interdependence, the formation of state monopolies of force, and inter-societal relations of competition and cooperation have in the history of the species and in the development of the human capacity to more bring unplanned processes under greater conscious regulation. The absence of a more comprehensive and multi-causal understanding of how the triad of controls has shaped the long-term process of human development at the various levels of people's relations with themselves, with non-human nature and with the social processes which they constitute,

locks Marx in a linear theory of history which blocks his capacity to actualise the immanent potential in his work and substitutes it with a more involved perspective, bound to the point of view of Western modernity. Consequently, Marx's work ends up embodying a modernist form of grand narrative which is dismissive of human plurality, and ignores the role of several dynamics and social processes shaping the history of the species.

This conclusion has led us, in section four of this chapter, to argue that both the potentials and the shortcomings of Marx's work point us in the direction of how a more adequate response to the problem of orientation might be developed which better attunes people to the reality of their global interconnectedness. In particular, we observed that it would have to assume the form of a theoretical framework which brings Marxian and Kantian themes together in a manner that captures the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of controls and actualises the immanent potential in Marx's critical theory for a multi-linear and open-ended explanatory model of the species' history and for an anticipatory non-transcendental assessment of the conditions of human freedom.

In the following four chapters of this study, we inquire into how such a means of orientation can be developed. In the next two chapters, we address Habermas's work and his reconstruction of Marx's critical approach as the most comprehensive example, in critical theory, of an attempt to achieve a higher synthesis between Marxian and Kantian perspectives on human development. There, we argue that even though Habermas is successful in recovering the role of language, the state and inter-state relations in the species' history, he does so, on a theoretical basis which reproduces a transcendental, linear and teleological answer to the problem of orientation and is thus found inadequate.

This conclusion leads us to the final two chapters of this study, where we carry out a detour from the critical theoretical tradition to engage with Elias's process sociology. There, we argue that Elias's more detached approach to the long-term history of the species can be read as a more adequate answer to the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation. However, that same emphasis on detachment also blocks Elias's capacity to provide a more adequate engagement with its anticipatory dimension, and the question of how human beings might make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing. As such, the final chapter of this study argues for the need of a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory, which would constitute a more adequate answer to both dimensions of the problem of orientation.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Jürgen Habermas**

#### **Evolutionary logic and historical dynamics**

In the previous chapter we argued that Marx's work points us in the direction of a non-transcendental, multi-linear and open-ended approach to the long-term process of human development which could achieve a more cosmopolitan perspective on the conditions of existence of globalised humanity and thus constitute a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation. However, we also noted how Marx's one-sided emphasis on human productive activity ultimately leads him to reproduce a linear model of the history of the species. This model poses a form of modernist myth which hides, under the veil of its expressed cosmopolitanism and its universal commitment to human self-determination, a more involved perspective which legitimizes relations of domination, exclusion and violence envisioning the subsumption of human difference to a single global model of 'civilised' society. As such, we concluded, Marx's theoretical framework is inadequate as an answer to either the explanatory or the anticipatory dimensions of the problem of orientation. This conclusion led us to argue, at the end of the previous chapter, that a more adequate cosmopolitan means of orientation could be found through a theoretical framework which brought together Kantian and Marxian themes on the basis of a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of controls in human development.

In this chapter and the following one, we read Habermas's work as the latest and most comprehensive attempt, within critical theory, to provide an adequate answer to the problem of orientation. Habermas is distinguishable from other critical theorists in the post-war period insofar as he maintains a commitment to the production of grand narratives which find their inspiration in the project for a self-reflexive Enlightenment – of which Kant and Marx can be read as a part of – envisioning the development of theoretical frameworks which enable a cosmopolitan study of the human condition and attune people both to the challenges and the opportunities of their global history and how they might more consciously navigate the future stages of their global integration. Habermas's multi-

disciplinary approach is evidence of this project, as his work weaves together several strands of thought, from pragmatism to critical theory, and encompasses very diverse authors such as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Herbert Mead, Talcott Parsons or Lawrence Kohlberg. In this study, we are particularly interested in highlighting how Habermas's work synthesises several Marxian and Kantian themes in a single theoretical framework which strives to retain these authors' most important insights regarding the long-term process of human development, while overcoming what Habermas sees as their most significant shortcomings; namely, the foundation of their respective critical approaches in a philosophy of history and a philosophy of the subject.

Our main argument in these two chapters is that Habermas's critical theory indeed produces a theoretical framework which is capable of providing a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between the three dimensions of the triad of basic controls; one which escapes Marx's reductionist focus on human productive activity while recovering important Kantian themes, such as the role of language, social norms, state formation and world politics in the history of the species. Furthermore, Habermas also provides us with an awareness of the role of deliberative processes of public discussion in the expansion of the human powers of conscious control over social processes and leads us to conclude that a more adequate means of orientation needs to attain a more detached perspective which is focused not only in identifying the conditions for the expansion of human self-determination but also the historical limits that it necessarily faces and that it must respect.

However, we also argue that Habermas is ultimately incapable of recovering, and actualising, the immanent potential of Marx's materialist and emergentist approach for a non-transcendental, multi-linear and open-ended answer to the problem of orientation. From the perspective of our inquiry, it can be said that Habermas's work implies an engagement with the explanatory dimension of orientation which is characterised by an attempt to achieve a more detached perspective on the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping human development through the production a theory of social evolution which operates on the basis of a theoretical distinction between the 'logic' and the 'dynamics' of the long-term history of the species. By interpreting the logic of human development not as an expression of the actual course of human history – but rather an abstract model of the pattern of development of human competences, such as the human powers of control and self-determination – Habermas seeks to attain a more intelligible

understanding of the structure of history which avoids reading it as either necessary, irreversible, linear or teleological. However, as we demonstrate throughout these two chapters, such a distinction between the logic and the dynamics of human development also leads Habermas to recover a Kantian-type of transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation, characterised by a reinstatement of a dualism between morality and history. Furthermore, associated with this transcendentalism, is also the reinstatement of a linear and teleological model of the logical structure human development. This model, even if not intended as an expression of the actual course of human history, still operates in Habermas's critical approach as the lenses through which he interprets the historical conditions of existence of the species. As such, even if unintentionally, and despite Habermas's claims to the contrary, he ends up recovering a Kantian engagement with the study of the long-term process of human development which poses a modernist grand narrative that, like Kant and Marx's theoretical frameworks, is incapable of capturing the plurality of humankind, or understanding the multi-linear and open-ended character of the species' history. Consequently, our analysis of Habermas's work also indicates how, despite his capacity to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay of the triad of basic controls, still, a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation cannot be found in a theory of social evolution which abstracts from the actual course of human historical development. This conclusion leads us, in chapter six, to engage with Elias's work as a historically-grounded, sociological and materialist approach, which provides an alternative to Habermas's more philosophical reconstruction of Marx's critical theory.

Given the breadth and complexity of Habermas's writings, as well as his position as the latest critical author which can be read as being engaged in the theoretical tradition of Kant and Marx envisioning the production of a more cosmopolitan means of orientation regarding the globalisation of the conditions of human existence, the analysis of his work is carried out, as already mentioned, in two chapters. The present chapter addresses Habermas's theory of social evolution and how it can be interpreted as synthesising Marxian and Kantian themes in an attempt to produce a more comprehensive and adequate grand narrative regarding the global web of interdependent humanity and how people might bring it under a greater degree of conscious and collective control. The chapter is divided into four main sections. First, we address Habermas's critique of Marx's work and how it leads him to

argue for a reconstruction of Marx's critical approach which preserves his insights concerning the long-term study of human development, while overcoming his one-sided emphasis on productive activity. Second, we read Habermas's theory of social evolution as an engagement with the explanatory dimension of orientation and show how his reconstructive project leads him to a higher synthesis between Marxian and Kantian themes in his assessment of the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping the species' history. Third, we address Habermas's work from the perspective of the anticipatory dimension of orientation to show how his theory of social evolution implies a recovery of a Kantian-type of transcendental answer to the ascertainment of the conditions of human freedom. And fourth, we analyse how Habermas's critique of modern societies can be read as bringing together these two dimensions of orientation.

This analysis leads us, in the next chapter, to engage with Habermas's work on world politics and address how he applies his theoretical framework to an analysis of human global interdependence. In that context, Habermas is interpreted as promoting a more cosmopolitan attunement in people's understanding of the conditions of existence of globalised humanity and how a greater degree of control can be exercised over the future stages of global integration of the species. Furthermore, in the next chapter, we also address the adequacy of Habermas's theoretical framework as a means of orientation and argue that, despite his capacity to recover important Kantian themes that were lost in Marx's work, Habermas also recovers a transcendental, linear and teleological model of human development which is inadequate as a means of orientation.

## **1. Reconstructing Marx**

In this section, we address Habermas's critique of Marx's work to argue that his project for a reconstruction of Marx's critical approach to overcome his one-sided emphasis on human productive activity leads Habermas to recover a Kantian awareness of the role of human self-control and linguistic consensualization of social norms in the long-term process of



human development as the basis for his more comprehensive account of the role of the triad of controls in the history of the species.<sup>274</sup>

In *'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism'*, Habermas argues that Marx's work is fundamentally compromised by a one-sided over-emphasis on production. The origin of this problem, according to Habermas, can be traced to the foundations of Marx's critical theory and his study of the alleged distinction between human and non-human animals. These reflections lead Marx to conceptualize 'social labour' as the distinguishing feature of the human stage of development. However, Habermas considers that the notion of social labour 'cuts too deeply into the evolutionary scale'.<sup>275</sup> It ignores how not only humans, but also other species of hominids, were distinguishable from other animals by the fact that they too carried out social labour.<sup>276</sup> Hominid hunting bands also made weapons and tools, cooperated through a division of labour, and distributed the products of their productive activity amongst the members of the group in an organised way. Hence, Habermas concludes, the concept of social labour is suitable for 'delimiting the mode of life of the hominids from that of the primates; but it does not capture the specifically human reproduction of life'.<sup>277</sup>

Instead, Habermas argues, humans are distinguishable from other animals in that they are the first known species on the planet to have developed forms of linguistic communication that enable them to constitute modes of social organization based on multi-dimensional role-taking. While other animals are locked in modes of social interaction in which every member of a group is assigned 'one and only one status', humans can linguistically establish common norms of social regulation and behavioural expectation that permit the same individual to possess more than one social role.<sup>278</sup> Hence, human existence is characterized by the possibility of linguistically establishing a system of social roles which is based on intersubjective recognition of expectations of behaviour, and not purely on the affirmation of individual status through contingent personal characteristics; such as physical strength and the capacity to physically overwhelm and punish others. In this context,

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<sup>274</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism' in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991), pp. 130-177.

<sup>275</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 134. Although Marx himself never describes his critical approach as 'historical materialism', Habermas chooses this designation in his argument about the need to reconstruct Marx's theory.

<sup>276</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 134.

<sup>277</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 135.

<sup>278</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 135.

Habermas considers that, throughout the long-term history of the species, the 'linguistification' of social life progressively integrated the formation of human motives for action in the 'symbolic world of interaction'.<sup>279</sup>

With the development of linguistically mediated social interactions, learned and symbolically transmitted forms of behaviour became, for the first time, the predominant mode of evolution of the species. While the evolution of other animals continues to be predominantly shaped by biological mechanisms, and the hominid stage of development was shaped by two mechanisms – biological and sociocultural evolution – that worked together through the simultaneous development of the brain and forms of proto-language, in the human stage sociocultural evolution came to assume the predominant role in the development of the species, far outpacing biological evolution.<sup>280</sup> This predominance of sociocultural over biological evolution explains how the diversity of human modes of life can be manifested in the context of a single biological species, and how human learning processes have outpaced those of other animals on the planet.

In light of this analysis, Habermas concludes that the 'specifically human' form of life only emerges historically with the development of language and, as such, Marx's emphasis on productive activity has to be complemented by an analysis of the role of language in the long-term process of human development.<sup>281</sup> Habermas thus argues for the need to reconstruct Marx's approach; a project he understands as taking 'a theory apart and putting it back together again in a new form in order to attain more fully the goal it has set for itself'.<sup>282</sup> Fundamental for this reconstruction is the awareness that whereas

Marx localized the learning processes important for evolution in the dimension of (...) technical and organizational knowledge (...) in short of *productive forces*, there are good reasons to assume that learning processes also take place in the dimension of moral insight, practical knowledge, and the consensual regulation of action conflicts.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 136.

<sup>280</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 134.

<sup>281</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 137.

<sup>282</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures' in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 95.

<sup>283</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 97.

Hence, Habermas proposes a two-track model of social evolution that comprehends it as occurring, simultaneously, in two dimensions: 'purposive-rational action' and 'communicative action'.<sup>284</sup>

Purposive-rational action refers to two main aspects of social behaviour. On the one hand, it refers to the empirical efficiency of technical means and, on the other hand, to the choice between suitable means directed towards the accomplishment of any given objective. While the former refers to technological development at the level of the forces of production, the latter refers to organizational choices regarding the best means for the realisation of such goals as organizing the labour force in the productive process. As such, collective learning at the level of purposive-rational action signifies a 'heightening of productive forces' through the development and application of 'technical-organizational knowledge'.<sup>285</sup>

Communicative action is defined, in contradistinction with purposive-rational action, as the linguistic establishment of mutual understandings about social norms that integrate behavioural expectations and define social roles. While purposive-rational action is predominantly concerned with the 'truth' of validity claims, – i.e. with the adequacy of knowledge claims about the empirical conditions of the labour process and how those permit the further development of the forces of production – communicative action is predominantly concerned with the 'rightness' of social norms, i.e. with the intersubjectively and linguistically established acceptability of social norms. Collective learning at the level of communicative action thus entails the development of 'moral-practical knowledge' which, embodied in social norms, expresses the common dominant understandings regarding prevalent social roles and behavioural expectations.<sup>286</sup>

From the perspective of our inquiry into the problem of orientation, Habermas's critique of Marx can be read as clearly pointing to the need to complement Marx's focus on productive activity – purposive-rational action in Habermas's conceptual apparatus – in a more comprehensive means of orientation which traces the influence of other social

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<sup>284</sup> According to Martin Jay, Habermas's project to reconstruct Marx's critical approach simultaneously shows how he acknowledge the criticisms made against the Marxist productive paradigm while maintaining that, even if no longer viable in its original form, it still retains historical importance as a critical theory of society, and that it is fundamental for the development of a 'grand theoretical synthesis' which 'bravely tries to accommodate the whole of human reality'. See: Jay, M. *Marxism and Totality* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1984), p. 464.

<sup>285</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 117.

<sup>286</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 117.

processes, such as linguistic communication and the development of social norms, in the history of the species. In particular, Habermas shows that the constitution, cohesion and development of human societies cannot be explained only from the perspective of the development of human control over nature and the forms of class competition and conflict which are associated with it. Rather, it also requires an understanding of how these relations of mutually interdependent competition can be subject to greater conscious and collective regulation on the part of human beings through the development of knowledge of a moral-practical sort and its embodiment in social norms and behavioural expectations. As such, Habermas complements Marx's awareness of the importance of human relations with nature in the history of the species with a recovery of the Kantian link between the development of human self-control and control over social processes. As Habermas observes, while purposive-rational action is connected with the development of people's control over external nature, communicative action involves not only an extension of collective control over social processes, but also an extension of human control over individual 'internal nature', in the sense of self-regulation of internal motives of action and behavioural patterns.<sup>287</sup> In this manner, Habermas's work can be read as opening the way for the production of an orientating framework aimed at a more comprehensive understanding of how the interplay between the three dimensions of human controls shapes the long-term process of human development.<sup>288</sup>

However, as the following sections of this chapter demonstrate, Habermas develops this analysis on the basis of an abstract theory of social evolution and a theoretical distinction between the logic and the dynamics of human development. As we argue in greater detail in the last section of the next chapter, this theoretical approach leads him to also recover the shortcomings of Kant's critical theory, in the form of a transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation and an explanatory model of the history

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<sup>287</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 146.

<sup>288</sup> In Thomas McCarthy's view, Habermas maintains the Marxist claim about the central role of social labour in human development, recognising that the social organisation of labour and distribution precedes the emergence of linguistic communication and social systems. But he also understands that, by itself, the concept of social labour is insufficient to explain the dynamics of human development and that the specifically human mode of life can only be adequately characterised if this concept is joined by that of intersubjectively and linguistically established behavioural roles and norms of social action. Hence, McCarthy argues, both 'production and socialisation' are of 'equal importance' for the reproduction of the species and 'govern the integration of both external and internal nature'. See: McCarthy, T. *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Massachusetts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1982), p. 238.

of the species which is both linear and teleological. In this manner, Habermas's work is instructive for our inquiry not only because it opens the way for a more comprehensive analysis of the triad of controls but also because it demonstrates how this analysis needs to be carried out on a materialist and emergentist basis, focused on a study of the empirical process of human historical development, in order to effectively attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition. Otherwise, if based on an abstract theory of social evolution like Habermas's, it remains locked in a more involved and time-bound perspective which continues to confuse the path of Western modernity with the universal path of the species' history.

In the next section, we interpret Habermas's theory of social as an answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation. In particular, we focus on Habermas's argument that it is collective learning processes in the domain of communicative action, rather than the development of the forces of production, that function as the main 'pacemaker' of social evolution.<sup>289</sup> In this context, we discuss Habermas's notion that the embodiment of moral-practical knowledge in a society's institutions and social norms constitutes one of the main dynamics shaping human social development by defining the 'principle of social organization' of human societies and establishing their 'range of possibility'.<sup>290</sup> The principle of social organisation is thus understood as determining a society's possible range of institutional change, its adaptive capacity to contingent problems, and the extent to which available productive forces can be socially utilized and their further development stimulated.<sup>291</sup> Hence, it circumscribes the possible growth of the forces of production, and only when that principle changes, can new technical-organizational knowledge be implemented to promote their further innovation. Consequently, Habermas argues that a more adequate critical approach to the long-term process of human development requires a theory of social evolution capable of explaining the development of moral-practical knowledge and its embodiment in social institutions and norms. Only on that basis, Habermas maintains, can a critical theory be developed that overcomes Marx's over-emphasis on productive activity, i.e. on purposive-rational action.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 160.

<sup>290</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 153.

<sup>291</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 153.

<sup>292</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 160. Habermas's theory of social evolution is thus oriented to overcome the incapacity of the Marxist paradigm of production to explain the

## 2. Communicative action and social evolution

As noted above, Habermas's theory of social evolution is based on a theoretical distinction between the logic and the dynamics of human development which, he argues, enables a more intelligible understanding of its logical structure without, however, assuming that this structure is necessarily reproduced in the actual course of historical events. The theoretical purpose of this distinction is made particularly clear in Habermas's article '*History and Evolution*'. There, Habermas argues that the limitations of philosophical history, such as the one produced by Kant, arise from the attempt to 'transpose' it into the actual 'writing of universal history', interpreting human historical development 'as if' it reproduces the linear and teleological model proposed by the theory of social evolution.<sup>293</sup> Instead, Habermas maintains that a more adequate approach is to understand the theory of social evolution not as a representation of the actual course of human historical development, but rather as an expression of the logic of development of 'universal competences', such as structures of consciousness and learning processes.<sup>294</sup> A theory of social evolution should thus capture the universal logical pattern of emergence and development of human competences without, however, assuming that this logic is reproduced in the historical course of events characterising the species' history. As such, Habermas argues, sociological considerations are not 'called for' in a theory of social evolution, because 'they fall short of the level of abstraction on which the structural conditions of possibility of learning processes relevant to evolution must be given'.<sup>295</sup>

It can be argued that Habermas is here clearly striving for the development of a theoretical approach which enables him to attain a more detached perspective on the human condition and patterns of change, which abstracts from empirical history and its chaotic, conflictual and contradictory character between more particularistic points of view.

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'grammar of forms of life' and the development of the sphere of cultural practices. An incapacity which, as Linklater argues, is at the heart of Marx's neglect to analyse modes of exclusion which are grounded in hierarchical representations beyond class, such as ethnicity, gender and race and, as we saw in the previous chapter, leads Marx to an underestimation of the historical importance of the state, geopolitics and war in human development and how the modern state cannot be explained only as an outcome of the development of capitalism. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 43. See also: Giddens, A. *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, vol. 2: *Nation-State and Violence* (London, Macmillan Press, 1985).

<sup>293</sup> Habermas, J. 'History and Evolution', *Telos*, 39, (1979) p. 8.

<sup>294</sup> Habermas, J. 'History and Evolution', p. 18.

<sup>295</sup> Habermas, J. 'History and Evolution', p. 28.

Habermas's argument implies that more involved and historically-embedded analyses can only indicate the existence of 'innovative potential' at certain historical junctures, but cannot 'explain' the formation of that innovative potential, i.e. why the emergence of certain human competences occurs and why their development follows a certain direction and not another. According to Habermas, such an explanation requires a more abstract ascertainment of the universal 'developmental logic of collectively shared structures of consciousness', which makes possible to 'non-arbitrarily identify the essential constitutive structures' of human societies.<sup>296</sup>

Furthermore, these more abstract evolutionary theoretical explanations, even when applied to the study of particular historical junctures – such as the transition to archaic high cultures or the transition to the modern era – not only need no historical analysis to support them, but they cannot be turned into 'history proper'.<sup>297</sup> As Habermas argues, in the framework of evolutionary social theory

'these transitions must be conceived as abstract transitions to new learning levels (which can perhaps be visualised as stages of development in the educational process of the human race) but they cannot, without endangering the categorical framework and thus also the explanatory power of theory, be translated back into the achievements of actors and reinterpreted into a history that is borne by actors'.<sup>298</sup>

According to Habermas, evolutionary social theory cannot thus be understood as expressing the 'macro-history' of a 'generic subject'.<sup>299</sup> Rather, by recognising that the 'bearers of evolution' are human societies themselves and the human subjects integrated in them, it occupies the position of an abstract model of the 'rationally reconstructible pattern' of the logic of development of human competences. If this evolutionary logic is 'separate from the events with which the empirical substrata change, we need assume neither the univocity, nor continuity, nor necessity, nor irreversibility of the course of history'.<sup>300</sup> The theory expresses only the 'logical' sequence of stages of human competences, in accordance with the rationally reconstructible pattern of development of 'anthropologically deep-lying general structures' which emerged in the phase of hominization and determine the

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<sup>296</sup> Habermas, J. 'History and Evolution', p. 29.

<sup>297</sup> Habermas, J. 'History and Evolution', p. 40.

<sup>298</sup> Habermas, J. 'History and Evolution', p. 40.

<sup>299</sup> Habermas, J. 'History and Evolution', p. 42.

<sup>300</sup> Habermas, J. 'History and Evolution', p. 42.

conditions of human social development.<sup>301</sup> Such sequence of stages describes the ‘logical terrain’ in which the emergence and development of human competences occurs, as well as the general direction that it assumes, but ‘whether or when new structural formations develop depends on contingent circumstances’ which cannot be captured by the theory.<sup>302</sup> In this manner, Habermas can be read as attempting to produce a more detached assessment of the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping the history of the species which overcomes the more involved points of view of historically-embedded perspectives such as Marx’s, without falling into the limitations of abstract philosophical history by assuming that the logic of historical evolution actually portrays the course of historical events. Habermas’s theory of social evolution thus strives to retain Kant and Marx’s search for a more intelligible understanding of the patterns of historical change while avoiding the shortcomings of both the philosophy of history and the philosophy of the subject which affect both of their critical approaches.<sup>303</sup>

As this section and the next demonstrate, when interpreted in the context of our inquiry into the problem of orientation, Habermas’s theory of social evolution fulfils an orientating function regarding both its explanatory and its anticipatory dimensions. On the one hand, it provides orientation regarding the conditions of emergence and development of human competences; in particular, it can be applied to trace the logic of the developmental pattern of the human powers of control throughout the history of the species. On the other hand, it also enables an ascertainment of the conditions of human freedom in accordance with the logic of development of human competences and the way in which these enable human societies to solve developmental problems which exhaust their adaptive capacities. Habermas’s theory of social evolution can thus be seen as providing orientation regarding the immanent potential that has been historically produced

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<sup>301</sup> Habermas, J. ‘History and Evolution’, p. 42.

<sup>302</sup> Habermas, J. ‘History and Evolution’, p. 42.

<sup>303</sup> According to Jørgen Pedersen, Habermas’s theory of social evolution is based on a distinction between the developmental logic that societies ‘can follow’ and the logic they actually ‘do follow’. The latter ‘depends of various empirical factors’, whereas the former is ‘universal’. Habermas’s thesis is that development does not ‘necessarily take place in a concrete society’, but if such development should take place, ‘it follows a certain logic’. This enables Habermas to claim that social evolution ‘possesses an element of universality’, and that any society that develops will do so ‘according to a reconstructed developmental logic’. As such, all developing societies must ‘move in the same way’ in relation to different stages that are ‘hierarchically ordered’. As Pedersen concludes, to Habermas, the evolutionary logic of social development is thus ‘universal’, but there is ‘no given necessity as to how a given society will develop’ historically, and it is this position that distinguishes Habermas’s approach from a philosophy of history, where this connection of necessity is made. See: Pedersen, J. ‘Habermas’s Method: Rational Reconstruction’, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 38: 4 (2008) p. 474ff.



for an expansion of human beings' conscious and collective control over their conditions of existence.

Throughout the rest of this section we address Habermas's theory of social evolution from the perspective of its engagement with the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation, while the next section focuses on its anticipatory dimension. The rest of this section is divided into two subsections. First, we analyse Habermas's theory of communicative action which strives to identify the logic of development of human communicative competences, structures of consciousness and moral-practical knowledge. As seen in the first section, these universal competences are directly connected with the development of the human powers of self-control and collective control over social processes. In the second subsection, we address how Habermas connects his analysis of communicative action with his overall theory of social evolution, by focusing on his conception of the developmental logic of the embodiment of moral-practical knowledge in social institutions and norms, through which human societies evolve between different principles of social organisation.

### **2.1. Communication and moral development**

In the book *'Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action'*, Habermas develops his theory of communicative action, through which he explains the logic of development of moral-practical knowledge with particular reference to Kohlberg's work and his attempt to explain the acquisition of universal competences at the level of individual moral development.<sup>304</sup> Like Habermas, Kohlberg is not focused on understanding the empirical processes through which the stages of moral development are manifested, but instead with providing an analysis of the 'internal logical' pattern of this development.<sup>305</sup>

As we saw in the first section, Habermas considers that communicative action entails collective learning processes that produce moral-practical knowledge, which is embodied both at the level of individual perspectives and world-views and at the level of social norms and social institutions, and which expresses different stages of development of people's common understandings regarding their social roles and acceptable behavioural

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<sup>304</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2003), p. 35.

<sup>305</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 33.

expectations. Following Kohlberg's analysis of moral development, Habermas argues that the development of communicative action and moral-practical knowledge follows three main logical stages: the pre-conventional, the conventional and the post-conventional. In the pre-conventional stage, human subjects obey social norms out of fear that not obeying them might entail sanctions imposed by a higher authority. At this stage, the rightness of social norms is assessed on the extent to which these are the product of an external authority that has the power to compel the behaviour of others. In the conventional stage, human subjects obey social norms out of personal loyalty and belonging to the particular social groups which enact them. At this stage, the rightness of social norms is assessed as being an inherent property of those norms, as expressions of a social group's culture and tradition. Hence, it is expressed in doing one's duty in society, upholding the social order, maintaining the welfare of society, and conforming to existent social roles by following peer behavioural expectations. In the post-conventional stage, human subjects become capable of stepping back from the perceived inherent legitimacy of authority and their personal group loyalties to assess the acceptability of social norms in accordance with principles which have been deliberatively established to hold universal validity. At this stage, social norms thus lose their quasi-natural validity and require justification from universalistic points of view. Their rightness is assessed in accordance with the extent to which they embody universal principles whose universal acceptability needs to be assessed in processes of communicative deliberation involving all persons likely to be affected by them.<sup>306</sup>

Our reinterpretation of Habermas's work as an engagement with the problem of orientation shows how each of these stages represents an increase in the level of detachment in people's modes of orientation towards each other and their societies. Progressively, people acquire the capacity to step back more and more from parochial and ethnocentric points of view and come to evaluate social norms not in accordance with their embodiment of more particularistic traditions and world-views but according to whether or not they are compatible with universalistic values. Effectively, the post-conventional stage can be characterised as expressing a fundamental cosmopolitan orientation in people's

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<sup>306</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 123ff. As Pedersen argues, the evolutionary logic of communicative action expresses a progressive 'decentring' of perspectives. It implies what Linklater characterises as the potential, existent in all human societies, for 'enlarging the sphere of discourse' so that it embraces wider realms of social and political life, including international relations. See: Pedersen, J. 'Habermas's Method: Rational Reconstruction', p. 478 and Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 120.

perspectives to the extent that the rightness of social norms comes to depend on whether or not these can be accepted by all who stand to be affected by them. In this context, we can argue that Habermas's analysis of the logical development of moral-practical knowledge recovers Kant's link between the development of people's self-control and that of control over social processes. It does so to the extent that it recognises that as human beings learn how to tame their personal loyalties and forms of emotional attachment to particularistic communities, they are able to attain a more detached and cosmopolitan perspective on the basis of which more universal social norms can be developed and consensualized between people which allow them to bring under greater conscious control the social processes in which they are enmeshed and the unplanned effects that might arise from them.

As we address in the next subsection, according to Habermas, these different stages of development of moral-practical knowledge are embodied not only at the level of individual perspectives and structures of consciousness but also in the social norms and institutions of their societies. As such, Habermas argues that parallel stages of development can be found at the level of human societies, in the form of different principles of social organization, as societies draw upon, and institutionally embody, the moral-practical knowledge that is made available at the level of their individual members' world-views in order to expand their adaptive capacity to contingent or unforeseen developmental problems.

## **2.2. The logic of social evolution**

As mentioned above, according to Habermas, individuals and societies are the real bearers of collective learning processes, which implies that it is often the case that their perspectives and consciousness structures express higher stages of development of moral-practical knowledge than those which are embodied in the social institutions and norms of their societies.<sup>307</sup> Hence, in order to rationally reconstruct the several stages of social development, Habermas suggests a distinction between: a) individual world-views and structures of consciousness and b) social institutions and norms. With such distinction in mind, he proposes a model of the history of the species that places the long-term process of

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<sup>307</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 158ff.

evolution of human societies in an ascending scale of logical stages of development. From the perspective of our inquiry, Habermas's theory of social evolution can thus be understood as addressing the explanatory dimension of orientation by capturing the developmental logic of human societies and how, as they move through each of these different stages, they exhibit increasingly more detached and cosmopolitan orientations, their social norms assume a more universal character, and their individual members progressively express a higher capacity for conscious control over both their internal inclinations and emotional attachments and the social processes which arise from their social interdependence.

Habermas distinguishes four main stages of social evolution: Neolithic societies, early civilisations, developed civilisations, and European or Western modernity. Neolithic societies are characterized by a) conventional world-views expressed in mythology and the compelling power of tradition and religion; and b) pre-conventional legal regulations of conflicts by an authority focused on the assessment of action consequences and compensation for resultant damages. Early civilisations express a) conventional world-views still present in the compelling power of religion and tradition, which now serve also legitimization functions for the occupants of positions of authority; and b) conventional legal regulations tied to the figure of the ruler who administers and represents justice. Furthermore, the regulation of conflicts undergoes a transition from compensations to punishment for the violation of social norms. Developed civilisations are characterized by a) post-conventional world-views that question the inherent validity of tradition and religion; and b) conventional morality that detaches from the person of the ruler and becomes embedded in social norms that, while dependent on tradition and religion, are systematized in a codified system of law. European or Western modernity is characterized by a) post-conventional world-views grounded in universal principles intersubjectively assessed on the basis of processes of linguistic deliberation and consensualization; and b) post-conventional morality separated from general, formal, rationalized law which embodies social norms that are considered legitimate to the extent that they derive from universalistic principles.<sup>308</sup>

The most distinctive feature of the modern stage of moral-practical knowledge is thus the disengagement which becomes possible from structures of authority and personal

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<sup>308</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 158ff.

group loyalties in a manner that opens the way for individual human beings to attain a more detached perspective, capable of integrating the points of view of other people who might find themselves not only within but also outside each individual's particular political community. Habermas's ascertainment of the logical stages of social development can thus be read as indicative of the progressive universalisation of people's modes of attunement towards the development of increasingly more cosmopolitan perspectives which, at the modern stage, become inherently connected with the globalisation of human interdependence, constituting both a condition and a response to the lengthening chains of interconnection between people, but also the basis, at the level of individual personality structures, for the development of post-national social norms which encompass increasingly wider groups of interdependent human beings and which enable them to exercise a greater degree of conscious control over their social bonds.

However, according to Habermas, modernity does not represent a pinnacle of human development. On the one hand, individual world-views and consciousness structures still express influences of pre-conventional and conventional forms of respect for authority and group loyalties, which frequently clash with the post-conventional orientation towards universalistic principles. On the other hand, as Habermas observes, future stages of development of moral-practical knowledge might be attained which cannot yet be envisioned and which would demand a rational reconstruction of the logical developmental pattern of communicative action.<sup>309</sup>

At this point in the argument, Habermas notes that while it is possible to identify the logical sequence of stages of social evolution, this sequence itself does not explain the mechanisms through which a society evolves between stages. In order to provide an account of such mechanisms, Habermas further complements his theory of social evolution

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<sup>309</sup> In Linklater's assessment, Habermas's account of modernity simultaneously holds that modernity reveals 'substantial progress' in understanding the possibilities and need for dialogue in social reproduction, as well as in overcoming practical obstacles to its embodiment in actual political life, while recognising Weber's thesis about the dangers of intensified domination and curtailment of human self-determination associated with the rationalisation process that accompanies modernity. Hence, while agreeing with Weber that Marx ignores how the socialisation of the means of production might not produce freedom but rather an intensification of dominating techniques of administration, Habermas also observes that the cognitive potential held in modern post-conventional world-views and consciousness structures opens the way for a more self-determined organisation of society on the basis of democratic processes of deliberation of social norms and behavioural expectations. In this manner, Habermas strives to capture the ambiguous and dialectical character of human development and its expression in modernity. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, pp. 120-123 and Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 333ff.

with an interpretation of processes of social learning that borrows conceptually from Parsons and Niklas Luhmann's work on systems theory. Integrating systems theoretical concepts in his theory of social evolution enables Habermas to combine, within a single theoretical framework, his two-track model of human development, simultaneously encompassing learning processes at the level of purposive-rational action and at the level of communicative action.<sup>310</sup>

Systems theory leads Habermas to conceive of human societies as social systems that, at any moment in time, are at a certain stage of evolution which, expressed in their principle of social organisation, defines their degree of adaptive capacity to contingent problems. Within such a stage, individual subjects undergo collective learning processes at both the level of purposive-rational and communicative action which entail the development of new stages of technical-organizational and moral-practical knowledge. While the latter is embodied in individual world-views and consciousness structures, the former is applied to the growth of the forces of production, but only within the limited range defined by the prevalent principle of social organization. According to Habermas, the moral-practical knowledge present in individual perspectives represents a 'cognitive potential' that can be socially used to expand a society's adaptive capacity, to the extent that it is 'institutionally embodied' in a manner that changes the prevalent principle of social organisation.<sup>311</sup> As such, Habermas observes that the principle of social organization that defines the stage of evolution of a society frequently lags behind the cognitive potential that has been acquired by its members.

The existent principle of social organization thus becomes a barrier to social evolution whenever 'system-threatening problems' arise which exhaust the boundaries of social adaptive capacity that it establishes. These developmental problems can be triggered by the endogenous dynamics of the social system, or by exogenous factors related to the environment of the social system, in the form of either its relations with external non-human nature or with other social systems. When such problems are posed, societies can evolve by institutionally embodying the cognitive potential, in terms of moral-practical knowledge, that is already present in their members' world-views and consciousness

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<sup>310</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 160. For a discussion of the limitations of systems theory that justifies its usage only with the complement of a theory of communicative action, see: pp. 170-175.

<sup>311</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 160.

structures.<sup>312</sup> Such institutional embodiment represents the development of a new principle of social organization and the establishment of a new stage of social evolution. This new principle widens the range of possibility of a particular society, increases its adaptive capacity to contingent problems and permits the further implementation of available technical-organizational knowledge at the level of the forces of production. The new principle of social organization then constitutes the new boundary condition within which new processes of collective learning can occur at the level of both purposive-rational and communicative action.<sup>313</sup> In this manner, Habermas's theory of social evolution can be seen to recover Marx's analysis of the dialectical movement of human history. However, he does it on a theoretical basis which overcomes Marx's reductionist emphasis on the predominant causal role of learning processes at the level of purposive-rational action by recognising the concomitant role of learning processes at the level of communicative action in the transition of human societies between different stages of development. This more comprehensive analysis, we argue, opens the way for Habermas's capacity to account for how the development of human societies and people's perspectives and world-views is shaped not only by the material conditions of human existence but is also fundamentally intertwined with the development of processes of linguistic deliberation of social norms and the development of decision-making processes at the level of social institutions.

In this context, and as we address in greater depth in the next chapter, the global interdependence of the species can be understood as posing a fundamental developmental problem to societies whose social institutions and basic forms of attunement still embody a conventional stage of moral-practical knowledge and thus exhibit a more involved and more particularistic perspective on the human condition, marked by the emotional elevation of the nation and their group-identity as the highest value and their main standpoint of orientation when relating with the rest of the world. These societies exhibit a principle of social organisation which lags behind the reality of human global interconnection and which poses a fundamental challenge to the extent that it prevents them from more consciously regulating the long chains of social interdependence with which they are bound. In particular, they are unable to detach from their more parochial points of view in a manner that allows them to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective which encompasses the

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<sup>312</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 160.

<sup>313</sup> Habermas, J. 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', p. 160.

perspectives of other societies with which they are mutually dependent and on the basis of which they can participate in inter-societal deliberative processes envisioning the development of post-national social norms that enable all the participant societies to bring under greater conscious control the global patterns of their shared interdependence. Habermas's theory of social evolution can thus be understood as an orientating framework providing guidance to people regarding not only the logical patterns of human development and the developmental problems that arise in its context, but also how these problems might come to be solved through the social embodiment of the more advanced stages of moral-practical knowledge that might already be available at the level of individual world-views as a result of collective communicative learning processes.

According to Habermas, his theory of social evolution thus permits a reconstruction of Marx's critical approach in a manner that overcomes its over-emphasis on production. By combining, in a single theoretical framework, an explanation of the logic of development of both purposive-rational action and communicative action it preserves Marx's insights regarding the role of productive activity in human development while opening the way for a recovery of the analysis of Kantian themes such as the role of linguistic communication, moral development, the constitution of political communities, and their cross-border interactions and encounters in the long-term history of the species. Furthermore, Habermas argues that his theory of social evolution, with its clear distinction between the logic and the dynamics of human development, is capable of providing a model of the logical developmental structure of social evolution without having to interpret human history as necessarily following its sequence of linear progressive stages. As such, in Habermas's view, it overcomes both the philosophy of history and the philosophy of the subject which characterise Kant and Marx's work. Finally, Habermas also argues that, despite the abstract character of his theory of social evolution, it preserves the essence of Marx's critical theory in the sense that it remains materialist and historically-oriented. It remains materialist insofar as 'it makes reference to crisis-producing developmental problems in the domain of production and reproduction'.<sup>314</sup> And it remains historically-oriented to the extent that it 'seeks the causes of evolutionary changes in the whole range of contingent circumstances [of societies]'.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 123.

<sup>315</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 123.



However, as we argue in the last section of the next chapter, despite Habermas's assertions to the contrary, his theory of social evolution actually locks him in a linear reading of the empirical history of the species which expresses a more involved and time-bound perspective than the cosmopolitan position to which he aspires. As such, Habermas's theory of social evolution not only pushes him away from Marx's materialist and emergentist approach and its potential for a multi-linear and open-ended conception of human development but also, as we discuss in the next section, leads him to recover a transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation and to reinstate a fixed conception of the conditions of human self-determination.

### **3. Recovering Kant**

In this section we continue to address Habermas's theory of social evolution, but rather focusing on what type of engagement it implies with the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation. In particular, we argue that it leads Habermas to recover a Kantian transcendental ascertainment of how human beings might come to exercise a greater degree of conscious and collective control over their conditions of existence in the context of globe spanning networks of human interdependence.

According to Habermas, his recovery of transcendentalism is capable of not only overcoming the problems connected with Kant's critical approach but also what he considers to be Marx's 'lack of clarity' regarding his normative criteria.<sup>316</sup> In Habermas's view, Marx limits himself to 'criticize immanently' the normative content of the ruling bourgeois world-views of his day which entails disclosing how their ideals of freedom and equality cannot be historically actualized in the context of capitalist society.<sup>317</sup> It is Habermas's argument that such an approach has become increasingly impossible to maintain given how bourgeois consciousness became 'cynical' and its ideals have 'gone into retirement' in the context of modern capitalism which, increasingly, has less need to hide its quest for capital growth under the cover of the supposed universality, freedom and equality of its social relations. In this manner, Habermas observes that Marxian immanent critique is

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<sup>316</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 96.

<sup>317</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 96.

faced with the unavailability of any norms or values that might enable its critique of capitalism.<sup>318</sup>

However, in light of our interpretation of Marx's work presented in chapter three, we can argue that Habermas's reading of Marx's engagement with the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation is inadequate. As we have shown, Marx's normative standpoint of orientation arises from his materialist and emergentist approach to human development and implies a historically-embedded and processual assessment of the immanent potential, gathered at each historical juncture, for the expansion of human beings' conscious control over their conditions of existence. As such, Marx's approach not only overcomes the need for a transcendental standpoint of normative orientation but also exhibits a significantly more detached perspective than that which Habermas attributes to it. In particular, Marx's normative orientation regarding the expansion of human self-determination is not limited to the time horizon of bourgeois modernity, but rather assumes a more detached perspective which enables him to support different modes of production as expressive of human freedom in accordance with the potential that has been gathered for its manifestation at different moments in the history of the species. Consequently, – and despite Marx's linear theory of history ultimately undermining the potential of his answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation – we argued that Marx's non-transcendental assessment of the conditions for the expansion of human conscious control opens the way to a grand narrative that guards against the reproduction of linear and teleological models of human development. In this context, we can argue that Habermas's reading of Marx does not follow this line of argument but rather remains framed in his assessment regarding the need for an abstract theory of social evolution which avoids what he perceives as the incapacity of historically-embedded perspectives to provide an understanding of the universal structure of development of human competences. As such, his answer to the

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<sup>318</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 97. According to McCarthy, while the universalistic value system of bourgeois society, expressed in civil rights and the right to participate in political elections, has been established in modern welfare states, these function on the basis of a 'formal democracy' that ensures 'generalised mass loyalty' but also an effective 'independence' of administrative decision-making from the specific interests of the citizens. They are thus 'democratic in form but not in substance'. Following Habermas, McCarthy argues that it could not be otherwise, as 'genuine participation' of citizens in democratic processes of will formation would bring to consciousness the 'contradiction' between administratively socialized production occurring in welfare states and the continued private appropriation and use of surplus value. See: McCarthy, T. *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, p. 368. See also: Habermas, J. *Legitimation Crisis* (London, Heinemann, 1973).

anticipatory dimension of orientation must also be read in the context of this goal as entailing the need for universal standards of orientation on the basis of an ascertainment of the ideal conditions of human freedom and their logical development. This position, however, takes Habermas back to a form of Kantian transcendentalism and moves him away from Marx's historically-grounded, emergentist and materialist approach, and its potential for an answer to the problem of orientation which, as we argued in chapter three, exhibits a more adequate involvement–detachment balance.

In the book *'Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action'*, Habermas argues that communicative action entails linguistic interactions between people directed towards the achievement of mutual agreements regarding the validity claims advanced by participants in dialogue<sup>319</sup>. With the purpose of analysing how Habermas's work can be read as addressing the problem of orientation we focus here mainly on his analysis regarding claims about the rightness of social norms, in the sense of the possible universalisation of shared agreements about the acceptability and legitimacy of social norms regulating interpersonal relations and mutual behavioural expectations.<sup>320</sup> In this context, Habermas makes an important distinction between 'communicative' and 'strategic' action. Whereas in the former each actor seeks to rationally compel the others to agree with his or her validity claims on the basis of the force of the better argument, in the latter, each actor seeks to influence the behaviour of others by means of the 'threat of sanctions or the prospect of gratification' in order to cause the interaction to continue as he or she desires.<sup>321</sup> Habermas considers that strategic action is constantly 'distorting' communicative action by establishing forced agreements between people based on social relations of power and domination that prevent the collective, consensual and self-determined regulation of social norms and conflicts.<sup>322</sup> Moral-practical learning, in Habermas's assessment, entails the progressive differentiation of communicative and strategic action and the substitution of the latter by the former as the predominant mode of assessing the rightness of social norms. Hence, at a post-conventional stage of development of moral-practical knowledge, the rightness of

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<sup>319</sup> Habermas distinguishes between three types of possible validity claims: claims to truth, claims to rightness and claims to truthfulness whether the speaker refers to something in the objective world, to something in the social world, or to something in his own subjective world. See: Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 58.

<sup>320</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 58.

<sup>321</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 58.

<sup>322</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 58.

validity claims can only be secured on the basis of intersubjective communication that permits the free agreement of all those involved in the deliberation process, decoupled from considerations regarding their respective social positions and intersubjective relations of power, which become perceived as distortions of the deliberative process.<sup>323</sup> The distortion of strategic action can thus be understood as the influence of more parochial and involved points of view which block the attainment of more cosmopolitan perspectives on the basis of which people might consensualize more universal social norms enabling the collective regulation of the social processes which they constitute. As such, Habermas's discussion of the interplay between communicative and strategic action clearly points to the need, under conditions of human global interdependence, of people's perspectives matching the more universal character of their interconnectedness through the attainment of post-conventional world-views and an expansion of the influence of communicative action in the regulation of social relations.

Post-conventional world-views appear as particularly adequate modes of mutual attunement in this context given their inherent understanding that, in order to be valid, social norms have to be the product of deliberative processes which respect a set of *a priori* presuppositions that entail the attainment of a truly cosmopolitan perspective. Habermas identifies these presuppositions as being the following:

Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse; everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever; everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever in the discourse; everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs; no speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down above.<sup>324</sup>

In empirically contingent historical processes of deliberation these ideal presuppositions are constantly distorted by strategic action associated with more parochial, ethnocentric and overall involved points of view; however, they remain the transcendental preconditions of a

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<sup>323</sup> Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 120.

<sup>324</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 89. According to Linklater, Habermas's rational reconstruction of the presuppositions of communicative action implies the recognition that 'true dialogue' is not a trial of strength between adversaries trying to convert others to their cause. Rather, it involves an acceptance that there is no prior certainty about 'who will learn from whom' and a preparation to anticipate that all points of departure will be modified in the course of dialogue. A position Linklater sums up as a 'commitment to be moved simply by the force of the better argument'. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 92.

truly valid common agreement and of the rightness of social norms.<sup>325</sup> The development of communicative action thus entails the progressive disclosure of these transcendental presuppositions in individual perspectives and consciousness structures, and opens the way for the attainment of more cosmopolitan points of view on the basis of which people can better attune to the realities of their global interdependence and how to collectively bring them under a greater degree of conscious control.<sup>326</sup>

According to Habermas, the transcendental presuppositions of communicative action which are disclosed at a post-conventional stage of development can be codified in the form of a maxim, a 'universalisation principle' which establishes that for a norm to be valid 'all affected [by this norm] must accept the consequences and side effects that its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone's interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities of regulation)'.<sup>327</sup> In true Kantian fashion, the principle of universalisation – also known as the 'all-affected principle' – constitutes a transcendental normative standpoint of orientation which establishes the preconditions of human self-determination in the form of a set of procedural principles that the deliberation of social norms has to embody in order for these norms to represent a truly universal agreement and thus enable human beings to collectively and consciously control their own conditions of existence by living under the law they give themselves as the law of their freedom. It presupposes the ideal projection of a 'universal communication community' which includes all beings capable of reason and which

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<sup>325</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p.85. In this context, Linklater argues that the fact that all human societies are structured on the basis of linguistic communication entails a universal potential for the actualisation of less distorted communication and processes of deliberative consensualization on the basis of which human beings might carry out a more self-determined existence. However, he also notes that the universal character of this potential does not mean that all societies are 'equally committed to discourse' as the means of establishing 'legitimate principles of association'. Frequently, tradition and relations of power and authority 'restrict' the opportunities for discourse, even in the most 'ostensibly democratic societies', and 'confine' it to the margins of society. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 120.

<sup>326</sup> Johannes Berger highlights how, to Habermas, the 'rational presuppositions' of discourse are always already present in human communication and although they are empirically distorted by relations of power they are also already 'true in practice'. See: Berger, J. 'The Linguistification of the Sacred and the Deslinguistification of the Economy' in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jurgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*, edited by Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991), p.167.

<sup>327</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 65.

overcomes particularistic points of view by implying the 'universal exchange of perspectives'.<sup>328</sup>

In this context, it can be argued that Habermas effectively recovers Kant's categorical imperative and idea of the kingdom of ends in the form of the all-affected principle and the projection of a universal communication community found in the transcendental presuppositions of communicative action. However, according to Habermas, he does so with an important difference. The fact that communicative action is orientated towards consensual agreements as the result of deliberative processes implies that the idea of a universal communication community must serve as a 'guiding thread' for the actual empirical 'setting up' of discourses that have to be carried through 'in fact', i.e. that have to be empirically and historically actualized. Unlike Kant's categorical imperative, the transcendental preconditions of communicative action cannot be satisfied by a 'monological mock dialogue' but demand the actualization of historical conditions that approximate the transcendental ideal. Hence, to the all-affected principle, Habermas adds a second principle, that of 'discourse ethics' that states that 'only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected *in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse*'.<sup>329</sup> Discourse ethics thus shifts the emphasis 'from what each can will without contradiction to be a general law, to what all can will in agreement to be a universal norm'.<sup>330</sup>

In light of our inquiry, Habermas's notion of discourse ethics can thus be said to connect the possibility of collective and conscious control over human global interdependence with the progressive historical actualization of deliberative processes that approximate the ideal communication community and with the development of post-conventional world-views and consciousness structures that attain increasingly more

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<sup>328</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 94. As Nancy Fraser observes, the all-affected principle holds that 'what turns of collection of people into fellow members of a public' is not shared citizenship, but rather their 'co-imbrication' in a common set of structures or institutions that affect their lives. As such, the all-affected principle inherently overcomes the Westphalia model of democratic politics by implying that the 'relevant public' in any valid decision-making process should 'match' the 'life-conditioning structures whose effects are at issue'. See: Fraser, N. 'Transnationalising the Public Sphere: On the legitimacy and efficacy of public opinion in a post-Westphalian world', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24: 4 (2007) p.22.

<sup>329</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 93.

<sup>330</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 67. In Linklater's assessment the 'aim' of discourse ethics is thus to 'remove' the modes of exclusion which obstruct the goal, potentially never realisable, of global arrangements which 'rest upon the consent of each and every member of the human race'. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 93.

cosmopolitan perspectives on the human condition and reduce the distortion of strategic action in social relations. Furthermore, it points to the fact that, concomitant with this universalisation of perspectives, there are also parallel processes of individuation and growing autonomy of human subjects, as their evaluation of rightful or morally correct behavioural expectations becomes shaped not so much by the social norms of their particular communities, but by what can be consensually agreed to as valid in processes of intersubjective deliberation encompassing increasingly wider communities of human beings. Hence, individuals de-centre their perspectives and learn to think from the point of view of others, in the process opening up their internal system of behavioural motivations to reflexive awareness which enables them to exercise a greater degree of conscious control over their own behaviour and consciously decide on what is acceptable and valid, instead of simply following the dominance of custom and tradition. Internal motive formation is thus opened up to conscious assessment, and to a validity test in light of universal principles discursively established. In this context, Habermas thus talks about a progressive 'moralisation of action' which accompanies the historical actualization of discourse ethics.<sup>331</sup>

As such, Habermas can be understood as establishing a direct connection between the historical actualisation of the principles of discourse ethics, the development of self-control over individual behavioural expectations and emotional attachments to particular communities and the development of collective control over the social processes shaping the conditions of existence of globalised humanity.<sup>332</sup> If these observations are combined with Habermas's awareness that collective learning processes at the level of purposive-rational action also lead to a growth of human forces of production that translates into a higher degree of control over non-human nature, we can see how the combination of the progressive development of the forces of production with the actualization of discourse ethics in social institutions and norms open up the historical possibility for an expansion of human self-determination at the three fundamental dimensions of human existence: external non-human nature, social processes, and internal human nature.<sup>333</sup>

By reading Habermas's work in the context of our inquiry into the problem of orientation we can argue that his notion of discourse ethics constitutes a transcendental

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<sup>331</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 183.

<sup>332</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 183.

<sup>333</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 183.

answer to its anticipatory dimension in at least two ways. First, it projects a universal universal communication community which defines the optimal conditions under which human beings can acquire greater collective and conscious control over their conditions of existence and thus fully express their capacity for self-determination. And second, by defining those ideal conditions it orientates people towards their actualization in history through the assessment – carried out with the help of the explanatory dimension of Habermas's theory of social evolution – of the cognitive potential that different human societies have gathered in their members' structures of consciousness and world-views for the further actualisation of discourse ethics.

As already mentioned, Habermas argues that discourse ethics, despite implying a recovery of Kantian transcendentalism avoids the shortcomings connected with Kant's critical approach. We can mention two fundamental ways in which discourse ethics is different from Kant's transcendental categorical imperative. First, Kant's idea of the kingdom of ends and its associated vision of a world federation of free republics advances a significantly more substantive and concrete conception of the ideal conditions of freedom. Habermas's discourse ethics and projection of an ideal communication community is distinguishable by being focused instead on the procedural aspects that any cosmopolitan arrangement of world society, whatever form it takes, has to embody in order to secure the conditions of human self-determination. As such, discourse ethics can be said to embody a more detached perspective than Kant's projection of the ideal institutional apparatus for the regulation of human global interdependence.<sup>334</sup> And second, Kant considers that the categorical imperative and the idea of the kingdom of ends are universally valid as an orientating standpoint across space and time and that their ascertainment depends on the capacity of individual human beings to rationally self-control their more animalic inclinations and on the constitution of social orders direct towards the development of reason, both of which are innovations that are theoretically open to all human societies given that human beings are more or less the same everywhere. Habermas's discourse ethics, on the other hand – and expressing the influence of Marx in his work – is substantially more oriented to

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<sup>334</sup> Habermas's approach to the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation thus operates what Linklater characterises as a 'shift' in emphasis from 'universalisable conceptions of the good life' to the 'procedural universals' which need to be in place for true dialogue to occur. Morality progressively stops being equated with substantive visions about human collective existence to rather entail a normative commitment to the ideal of actualising the formal presuppositions of discourse ethics. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 41.



the developmental character of human beings, recognising that the ascertainment of its principles are not accessible to human beings everywhere, but depends on long-term collective learning processes that people have to undergo and on the acquisition of a post-conventional stage of development at the level of their world-views and consciousness structures.

Furthermore, to these differences, Habermas adds another two. On the one hand, he argues that on the contrary of Kant's categorical imperative discourse ethics does not entail a dualism between the ideal conditions of freedom and the historical dimension of human existence. Given that the transcendental presuppositions of communicative action are always inherent in deliberative processes conducive to common agreements they have a fundamentally pragmatic dimension which avoids such forms of dualism. On the other hand, he observes that discourse ethics rejects Kant's monological ideal role-taking and substitutes it with the requirement of an empirical public discourse that approximates as much as possible the transcendental preconditions of communicative action in order to test the actual universality of validity claims.<sup>335</sup>

However, Habermas's arguments regarding his capacity to recover Kantian transcendentalism without reproduction its shortcomings appear less compelling in light of our engagement with the problem of orientation and our interpretation of Kant's work in chapter two. First, Habermas's approach is still clearly permeated by a dualism between the transcendental ideal of discourse ethics and the dimension of contingent history where strategic action and historical events distort the actualisation of its principles. The projection of an ideal universal communication community to be approximated in empirical processes of deliberation thus fulfils the same orientating role in Habermas's approach, and establishes the same type of dualism, as does the transcendental idea of the kingdom of ends in Kant's work. Second, as we noted in chapter two, the monological perspective where ideal role-taking takes place in the isolated mind of the rational subject applies only to Kant's consideration of pure rational beings. In his political writings, when dealing with the long-term process of human development, it is clear that Kant, similarly to Habermas, envisions a progressive historical actualization of the transcendental conditions of freedom through the establishment of institutionally guaranteed processes of intersubjective communication and

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<sup>335</sup> Habermas, J. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 203.

consensualization which diminish the influence of relations of power and of more particularistic points of view in the deliberation of common agreements regarding the universal acceptability of social norms. Finally, third, despite Habermas's discourse ethics exhibiting an awareness of the developmental character of the universalisation of people's perspectives, this awareness is still framed by a theory of social evolution which conceives of this process as entailing a linear sequence of stages. As we argue in the last section of the next chapter, despite Habermas's argument that his analysis of the developmental logic of moral-practical knowledge is not intended as an account of the actual course of human history, it still constitutes the theoretical lenses through which it is observed and thus still entails the same type of danger that affects Kant's work of theoretically dismissing alternative forms of human self-expression which do not follow its linear and teleological model of the species' history.

So far in this chapter we have addressed how Habermas's work and in particular his theory of social evolution can be read as an answer to both dimensions of the problem of orientation which entails a more comprehensive assessment of the role of the interplay of the triad of controls in the history of the species. In particular, we noted that Habermas is capable of complementing Marx's analysis of the linkage between human control over nature and over social processes with an awareness of the role assumed in this context by the development of human self-control over people's behavioural expectations and its connection with social processes such as the development of social norms, state formation, and world politics. In the next section, we consider of how this more comprehensive framework fulfils an orientating function regarding both the developmental challenges that face modern societies under conditions of global interdependence and the immanent potentials these gather for an extension of the human powers of self-determination.

#### **4. Civilisation and reification**

Following Habermas's distinction between the logic and the dynamics of human development, the previous three sections addressed Habermas's work from the perspective of his engagement with the logical level of analysis. In this section, we turn to an analysis of the dynamics of human development. In particular, we focus on the intra-state level of analysis, addressing Habermas's texts regarding the development of the human conditions

of existence and of people's capacity to exercise conscious control over them in the context of national welfare states. Then, in the first three sections of the next chapter, we move this discussion to the level of world politics.

As already mentioned, Habermas's theory of social evolution can be understood as a means of orientation on the basis of which human beings at different moments in history can better understand their conditions of existence and how to expand their powers of conscious control over them. In this context, Habermas's work entails a characterisation of the dynamics of human development as being predominantly shaped by the interplay between civilisation and reification. On the one hand, civilisation refers to the expansion of human beings' capacity to bring unplanned social processes under greater control. Human societies become more 'civilised' as they institutionally embody moral-practical knowledge that permits them to approximate the transcendental ideal of a universal communication community and reduce the distortion of strategic action in processes of communicative interaction between people. Historically, this process is expressed in the progressive diminution of social relations based on power, violence and domination, as a result of the growing influence of deliberately consensualized social norms in the regulation of individual behavioural motivations, of state functioning, and of productive activity. On the other hand, reification refers to the loss of human beings' control over social processes as a result of the unplanned interweaving of human actions in the context of long chains of mutual competitive interdependence. It thus entails the continued predominant of strategic action in social relations and the growing distortion of communicative action.<sup>336</sup>

We can thus observe that Habermas's conception of civilisation reveals a more detached perspective than Marx's, to the extent that civilisation is not understood in a static and essentialist manner – as representing a stage which some human groups reach and which distinguishes them from the 'barbaric' and the 'uncivilised' – but rather as a long-term and species-wide process that moves along a continuum in accordance with the higher or lower degree of development of the triad of human controls.<sup>337</sup> This more technical

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<sup>336</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 10.

<sup>337</sup> Habermas's concept of civilisation is developed with reference to Elias's process sociology and his analysis of the civilising process of Western European societies. However, as we show in chapter six, Habermas's conception of civilisation becomes different from that of Elias once it is integrated with his theory of social evolution. To Elias, civilisation refers to a long-term process of development characterised by changing patterns of human self-control over internal drives and impulses and by a transformation of people's attitudes towards violence and of their scope of mutual emotional identification. To Habermas, the concept comes to

usage of the concept in Habermas's work is closer to Kant's, and can be understood as expressing Habermas's attempt to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition and to orientate people away from more involved and time-bound points of view which fulfil self-congratulatory purposes. By conceived civilisation in this more detached manner, Habermas is inherently promoting a transformation in people's modes of attunement towards each other which is more in line with their global interdependence, in so far as it highlights their participation in the long and collective struggle of the species to learn how to tame the determining forces that have shaped human existence on the planet.

It is important to note that Habermas only starts to describe the dynamics of human development as a civilising process in his later work, most clearly in *'The Crisis of the European Union: A Response'*. However, our reading of his earlier writings in this section is also shaped by this conception for two main reasons. First, given the importance that the notion of civilisation assumes in Habermas's later work, by applying it in the analysis of his earlier writings we can better underline the connection between Habermas's earlier considerations on human development at the intra-societal level and his later reflections on world politics. And second, given the importance that the concept assumes in our analysis of the works of Kant and Marx, it permits us to better compare Habermas's critical approach with those of the other two authors.

In order to understand Habermas's conception of the dynamics of human development as involving a constant interplay between civilisation and reification, we need to analyse his distinction between 'system' and 'lifeworld' which, according to Habermas, constitutes a structural feature of the species' history. Throughout the rest of this section we discuss Habermas's analysis of this interplay at the intra-societal level in order to establish the basic conceptual apparatus which allows us, in the next chapter, to address Habermas's work on world politics from the point of view of our inquiry into the problem of orientation.

In *'The Theory of Communicative Action'* Habermas conceives of human societies as necessarily structured by processes of communicative interaction between their members. The symbolic world established by human communication, into which every human being is

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entail the progressive historical actualization of the transcendental presuppositions of communicative action through the institutionalisation of processes of deliberative consensualization as the main mechanism for the assessment of the validity of social norms. However, both authors share a conception of the term that directly connects it with the development of the human powers of control.

born, is described as a 'lifeworld'.<sup>338</sup> According to Habermas, the collective learning processes that enable the development of moral-practical knowledge at the level of individual perspectives and consciousness structures entail a progressive 'rationalisation' of people's lifeworlds.<sup>339</sup> For example, the transition from a conventional to a post-conventional stage of moral-practical knowledge in the modern age means that social norms can no longer secure their validity on the basis of tradition but only on the basis of consensual and deliberatively achieved agreements between communicative actors.<sup>340</sup> As such, the previously unquestioned power of tradition is substituted by communicative action as the main basis for social integration. The symbolic lifeworld of each society, in which human life and social interactions are enmeshed, thus loses its 'quasi-natural' validity and is 'rationalised', in the sense of requiring justification and legitimation on the basis of communicative processes of deliberation.<sup>341</sup> As Habermas observes, the more communicative action takes over from tradition the functions of validation of social norms and behavioural expectations, the more the transcendental principles of discourse ethics gain empirical influence in real communication communities.<sup>342</sup> As such, principles of democratic will-formation and universalistic principles of law come to be progressively embodied in modern states.<sup>343</sup> To Habermas, this institutional embodiment expresses the progressive civilisation of human societies, in the sense that social institutions and norms become increasingly regulated by processes of communicative deliberation which permit people to exercise a greater degree of collective and conscious control over their conditions of existence.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 126.

<sup>339</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 86.

<sup>340</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 76.

<sup>341</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 91.

<sup>342</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 96.

<sup>343</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 96.

<sup>344</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 96. It can be noted how Habermas's interpretation of modernity contrasts with Weber's thesis of the 'iron cage', and with the more pessimistic moments of the Frankfurt School, in the works of Horkheimer or Adorno, to whom rationalisation is frequently equated with the increased power and domination of logics of administrative control over social life. As Jeffery Alexander argues, Habermas's theory of communicative action enables him to highlight how the rationalisation of social life implies the disclosing of general principles, in the form of a normative commitment to discourse ethics, which can fulfil the integrative function that was previously taken on by religious and mythological world views, in a manner that acts as a form of resistance against the dominating tendencies also associated with the process of modernisation. See: Alexander, J. 'Habermas and Critical Theory: Beyond the Marxian Dilemma?' in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*, p.56. As we see below, Habermas's analysis of the dynamics of human historical development in light of his theory of social evolution strives to capture this dialectical character of human development and the

However, Habermas also observes that the ‘freeing’ of communicative action from tradition, associated with the development of post-conventional world-views, also forces the ‘separation of action oriented to success from action oriented to mutual understanding’.<sup>345</sup> Hence, modern societies are characterized by a differentiation between those areas which are integrated on the basis of communicative action and those in which processes of deliberative consensualization are still fundamentally distorted by strategic action. Following this distinction, Habermas argues that in highly complex modern societies – characterised by an advanced division of labour and by highly intricate relations of interdependence between people with specialised social functions – the task of social integration cannot occur purely on the basis of communicative action. The time-consuming aspect of processes of communicative deliberation as well as the constant danger of not reaching common agreements threatens the reproduction of certain social areas. This is particularly the case in areas like human productive activity and control over non-human nature, which depend on rapid decision-making and coordination of specialised activities.<sup>346</sup> Consequently, Habermas argues that the transition of social integration to communicative action also constitutes a developmental problem to modern societies.<sup>347</sup>

In Habermas’s view, the solution to this problem can already be found in the cognitive potential gathered by post-conventional world-views and the distinction these establish between communicative and strategic action. In order to ensure the reproduction of highly complex societies, communicative action needs to be unburdened from certain tasks of social integration. This can be accomplished to the extent that the integration of certain social areas continues to be carried out on the basis of strategic action; for example, the worker and employer relation in the context of a capitalist enterprise. Habermas thus suggests that modern societies need to be regulated by a principle of social integration that permits communicative action to carry out tasks of social integration in areas such as the validation of social norms, the socialisation of individuals, or cultural reproduction, while strategic action carries out tasks of social integration in the areas of material reproduction

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interplay between the emancipatory and dominating potential affecting the modern stage of human social development.

<sup>345</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 180.

<sup>346</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 183.

<sup>347</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 183.

and administration of the state.<sup>348</sup> The historical expression of this principle of organisation, according to Habermas, is found in modern democratic welfare states. These possess a clear demarcation between, on the one hand, a capitalist economy and a state bureaucratic apparatus integrated on the basis of strategic action and which fulfil functions of material reproduction and state administration and, on the other hand, a lifeworld constituted by a public sphere and private households integrated on the basis of communicative action which fulfils functions of communicative validation of social norms, socialisation of individuals and cultural reproduction.<sup>349</sup>

As Habermas observes, in the social areas integrated by strategic action relations between people are structured predominantly on the basis of power and money. Power and money function as social resources which possess inherent non-communicative validity and exert influence over individual behavioural expectations, compelling people to comply with certain social roles. For example, in the context of a capitalist enterprise, relations on the basis of money paid to workers in the form of wages compel them to fulfil certain roles in the context of the production process, and enable their employers to integrate their specialised activities in a particular manner, conducive to the fulfilment of the objectives of the enterprise. Relations of power and money thus replace linguistic communication with a 'system of rewards and punishments' that secures the integration of individual actions without the need for processes of communicative deliberation.<sup>350</sup> Hence, in the social areas where strategic action takes over functions from communicative action, the linguistically structured lifeworld is pushed away to form their external environment; consequently, these areas assume an increasingly autonomous character in relation to lifeworld contexts and the communicative processes that structure them.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> As Hans Joas observes, Habermas does not share the Marxian position regarding the possibility of overcoming relations of power between human beings in the context of productive activity. Rather, he maintains that relations based on strategic action are fundamental for the self-regulation of societal mechanisms, such as material reproduction, in the context of complex modern societies. See: Joas, H. 'The Unhappy Marriage of Hermeneutics and Functionalism' in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jurgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*, p. 111.

<sup>349</sup> See: Habermas, J. *Legitimation Crisis*.

<sup>350</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 183.

<sup>351</sup> In Joas's view, to Habermas, media such as power and money have a fundamental 'problem-solving' role in modern societies. Both in the sphere of rational economic activity, through the medium of money, and in the sphere of rational administration, through the medium of power, strategic action is fundamental for the 'successful fulfilling of societal tasks'. In these social areas the demand for communicative regulation would be 'out of place' because it would 'never be able to compete, from the standpoint of effective, with the other

As these social areas become more autonomous from the lifeworld of each society, they also escape the collective control of communicative processes of deliberation, which now can only influence them indirectly, by establishing the normative boundary conditions for their operation. Hence, Habermas argues that the transfer of social integration over to strategic action 'appears from the lifeworld perspective both as reducing the costs and risks of communication and as conditioning decisions in expanded spheres of contingency'.<sup>352</sup> The differentiation between those social areas integrated on the basis of strategic action and those integrated on the basis of communicative action expresses a progressive 'decoupling' of systemic, autonomous, contexts from the communicative lifeworld.<sup>353</sup>

In this context, Habermas notes that the autonomy of systems from the lifeworld of each society is a long-term process that accompanies the evolution of the species.<sup>354</sup> In tribal societies at a pre-conventional stage of social evolution, systemic contexts appear predominantly in the form of the system of personal and material exchange of spouses and ritual items between different tribes. At this stage, these systems are still enmeshed in the lifeworld of each particular tribe, defined by tradition and religion, and in which there is still no differentiation between strategic and communicative action. The differentiation between systemic contexts and the lifeworld of each society only starts to appear in politically stratified class societies at a conventional stage of social evolution. Here, occurs a decoupling of political authority from the prestige of leading descent groups to the extent that political power starts to derive from the disposition over judicial means of sanction and the control of the monopoly over the means of violence, thus becoming crystallised around a new system, the state. At the same time, markets for goods arise under the conditions of greater pacification established by the state with monopoly control over the means of violence, and start to become integrated on the basis of money relations. At this stage, the economic system thus begins to be differentiated from the state system, but is still fundamentally dependent on state power for its functioning. However, despite the growing differentiation of the economic and the state systems from the lifeworld, these do not yet become autonomous systemic contexts, nor is there a fundamental differentiation between

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kinds of regulation proper to these spheres'. See: Joas, H. 'The Unhappy Marriage of Hermeneutics and Functionalism', p. 111.

<sup>352</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 183.

<sup>353</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 120.

<sup>354</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 159ff.



strategic and communicative action. To the extent that the conventional stage of social evolution secures social integration on the basis of tradition, systemic contexts remain enmeshed in the traditionally structured lifeworld of each society.

Finally, in modern societies at a post-conventional stage of social evolution, the differentiation between strategic and communicative action permits the autonomy of systemic contexts from the lifeworld of each society. The economic system becomes a capitalist market economy predominantly integrated on the basis of money, which develops its own dynamics in conditions of relative freedom from lifeworld normative expectations, while the state bureaucratic apparatus becomes a system predominantly integrated on the basis of relations of power. These systemic areas not only assume increasing autonomy from the lifeworld of each society and its communicative processes of deliberation, but also react back upon it in an attempt to secure the required conditions for their reproduction. To illustrate this argument, Habermas reinterprets Marx's critique of capitalism in light of his own theory of social evolution to demonstrate how an autonomous capitalist economic system constantly strives to submit increasingly larger areas of society to integration on the basis of strategic action as a way to improve its own conditions of reproduction. This means, for example, the privatization of public sectors such as health and education, or the transformation of legal frameworks to reflect capitalist systemic needs, such as the reduction of labour costs and of social protections to workers.<sup>355</sup> This systematisation of the lifeworld through the subsumption of an increasing number of social areas to integration on the basis of relations of power and money necessarily implies a growing distortion of processes of communicative deliberation by strategic action, which undermines the validity and self-determined character of social agreements and norms. In this manner, society is increasingly reified, a process characterised by human beings' collective loss of control over their conditions of existence which, increasingly, become shaped not by deliberative processes of consensualization, but by relations of power and money and the unplanned dynamics that arise from them.<sup>356</sup>

In this context, Habermas's analysis points to an 'indissoluble tension' between reification and civilisation that characterizes the long-term process of human

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<sup>355</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 351.

<sup>356</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 351.

development.<sup>357</sup> On the one hand, the growing integration of society on the basis of communicative action permits a process of civilisation characterised by the expansion of human beings capacity to bring social processes under conscious control. On the other hand, communicative action also needs to be unburdened from the task of social integration in some social areas which is accomplished through their integration on the basis of strategic action. As such, the reification of society becomes a basic need of social reproduction at a certain stage of human development. However, while the lifeworld is released from the task of communicative integration through reification, it also needs to resist the complete reification of society to the extent that it represents a loss of communicative control over social development.<sup>358</sup> Furthermore, as we discuss in the next chapter, Habermas notes that this tension only increases in the context of globe spanning webs of human interdependence, as systemic contexts tend to ignore the frontiers of welfare states and break down the distinction between domestic and international politics, as is exemplified by the progressive interweaving of national economies in the context of a world capitalist market.

By reading the above exposition of Habermas's analysis of the dynamics of human development at the intra-societal level as an answer to the problem of orientation, it can be argued that Habermas is seeking to provide orientation regarding not only the historical potential for the expansion of people's powers of self-determination which is opened up by the development of modern societies and post-conventional world-views, but also the constraints and limitations that this expansion necessarily encounters and has to respect. This is particularly evident in Habermas's conclusions concerning the development of democracy in *'Between Facts and Norms'*. There, Habermas observes that despite the systemic character of capitalist economies and the bureaucratic apparatus of modern states, the post-conventional perspectives of modern citizens obliges states to at least partially embody the principles of discourse ethics in their institutions in the form of a

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<sup>357</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 345.

<sup>358</sup> Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 345. Habermas also notes that there is a limit to the possible reification of modern societies which is reached when social integration on the basis of strategic action starts to encompass those areas where communicative consensualization cannot be replaced, such as cultural reproduction or the socialization of individuals. When strategic action distorts processes of deliberative consensualization in those areas, Habermas talks about a 'colonisation' of the lifeworld by relations of power and money, which compromises the social development of individuals and, consequently, threatens the reproduction of society as a whole. See: Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, v.2, p. 196.

democratic elections system, of parliamentary politics, and of a system of law which is responsive to them. These institutions, in Habermas's view, function as the main channels through which deliberative publics can influence the systemic contexts of the economy and the state's bureaucracy. This influence is expressed in the form of processes of deliberative and public discussion in the public sphere of each state, which assess the validity of social norms and of the functioning of the state system, and which are channelled, in the form of communicative power, into the state's institutions where they influence parliamentary politics and are transformed into legislative decisions and administrative power.<sup>359</sup> Consequently, the lifeworld of each society can have a democratic influence over the state, leading it to enact laws that protect the lifeworld from reification and which serve as a medium to establish greater communicative control over systemic contexts, namely, by normatively defining the boundary conditions for the operation of the capitalist economy and the state's bureaucratic system.<sup>360</sup>

However, Habermas also observes that the realistic need for the reification of some social areas so as to release communicative action from the task of ensuring the complete integration of society implies that deliberative publics can never exercise complete communicative control over the whole of social integration and that some areas, such as the economy and the bureaucracy, have to remain outside the lifeworld in the form of more or less autonomous systems integrated on the basis of strategic action through the mediation of power and money.<sup>361</sup> Consequently, it is Habermas's argument that 'democratic movements emerging from civil society must give up holistic aspirations to a self-organising society, which undergirded Marxist ideas of social revolution'.<sup>362</sup> At the most, the lifeworld of each society can have only an 'indirect effect' on systemic contexts, through its influence in the enactment of the social norms circumscribing the functioning of the capitalist economy and the state.<sup>363</sup>

As such, we can argue that Habermas's theory of social evolution and its analysis of modern welfare states, when interpreted as an orientating framework, seek to attune people to not only to the possibility, but also to the barriers to the expansion of their powers

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<sup>359</sup> Habermas, J. *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 299.

<sup>360</sup> Habermas, J. *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 300.

<sup>361</sup> Habermas, J. *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 372.

<sup>362</sup> Habermas, J. *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 372.

<sup>363</sup> Habermas, J. *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 372.

of conscious control over the three dimensions of human existence. Habermas appears to abandon Marx's vision of bringing under control the totality of social relations of a globally interdependent species, and rather seeks to attain a more detached perspective that recognises that the inherent complexity of modernity makes more totalizing political projects unsustainable not only because they are impractical, but because they might reveal themselves dangerous for social reproduction. In this context, we can thus consider that Habermas's work points to the fact that a more adequate means of orientation under conditions of human global interdependence needs to recognise both the potential and the limits of human conscious control, and rather than advance political visions of a fully self-determined future, needs to orientate people regarding how a more adequate balance can be struck between reifying and civilising trends in human development.<sup>364</sup> As we argue in the next chapter, from the perspective of Habermas's theory of social evolution, this balance can be achieved on the basis of the actualization of the cognitive potential of post-conventional world-views through the institutionalisation of the principles of discourse ethics at both the state level and at the level of world politics, in the regional and global associations of states regulating the long webs of human interdependence.<sup>365</sup>

## Conclusion

Our reading of Habermas's critical approach in this chapter leads us to argue that his theory of social evolution can be understood as an attempt to develop a more adequate means of orientation which overcomes Marx's shortcomings in the form of an over-emphasis on human productive activity and a too linear connection between the development of human conscious control over nature and the universalisation of people's perspectives. In particular, an analysis of Habermas's work framed by our inquiry implies at least three conclusions regarding the problem of orientation. First, a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition requires a greater awareness of the role of the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of controls in the species' history. Second, this implies the need for a

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<sup>364</sup> As Linklater observes, Habermas moves away from a Marxian critique of the totality of capitalist society to a form of 'thin universalism' whose normative goal is that an increasing number of human beings cooperate to eradicate unjust exclusion without assuming that they will ever live in a condition in which they have 'overcome all constraints upon their freedom'. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 99.

<sup>365</sup> Habermas, J. *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 372.

theoretical framework that combines Kantian and Marxian themes by identifying the link between social processes such as the development of the forces of production, social norms, state formation and world politics in the development of the human powers of conscious control. In particular, Habermas highlights the central place that deliberative processes of consensualization of norms assume in the development of people's self-control, control over nature and control over social processes. And third, Habermas's critical approach also points us to how a more detached orientating framework must not only identify the immanent potential for an expansion of human self-determination but also recognise and attune people towards the necessary limits to the exercise of their powers of control. This implies not only maintaining Marx's awareness about the need to more consciously control the human capacity for control, but also recognise, from a less involved point of view, that the complexity of the human condition is bound to make impossible totalising projects envisioning the complete self-determination of the species, and that a more realistic assessment of the human conditions of existence rather implies a constant balancing act between planned and unplanned social processes.

At the end of this chapter, we noticed that this balance implies a constant tension between reifying and civilising trends in the long-term history of the species, and that this tension is magnified in the context of the globe spanning webs of human interdependence which blur the distinction between the intra- and inter-societal politics. In the next chapter, we further develop this argument through an analysis of Habermas's work on world politics. There, we argue that Habermas's proposal for the constitutionalization of world society can be read as providing an orientating framework regarding how human beings might attain a better balance between planned and unplanned social processes and thus extend their conscious control over their conditions of existence and the globalisation of the species. Furthermore, we also address the shortcomings Habermas's work and what these teaches us about the inadequacy of a theory of social evolution as an answer to the problem of orientation.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Jürgen Habermas**

#### **The political constitution of world society**

At the end of the previous chapter we addressed Habermas's argument that the latest stage in the global interweaving of the species intensifies the tension between civilisation and reification verified in modern welfare states. In this chapter, we continue to address Habermas's work from the point of view of our inquiry into the problem of orientation to argue that his writings on world politics can be read as providing an orientating framework regarding how a more adequate balance can be struck between planned and unplanned social processes by actualising the cognitive potential present in the post-conventional world-views and consciousness structures of modern citizens. In particular, we address Habermas's proposal for the political constitution of world society as a reconstruction of Kant's proposal for perpetual peace which tries to express a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition on the basis of which people can better attune to the reality of their global interconnection.

Furthermore, at the end of this chapter we also turn to a discussion of the shortcomings that can be identified in Habermas's critical approach and what these imply for the development of a more adequate means of orientation. We argue that despite Habermas's capacity to produce a more comprehensive analysis of the role of the triad of basic controls in human development, he relies on a theoretical framework which, ultimately, is incapable of providing a more detached perspective on the conditions of existence of globalised humanity and function as a more cosmopolitan orientating framework. In particular, we note that the distinction between the logic and the dynamics of human development which structures Habermas's theory of social evolution, as well as its recovery of a transcendental ascertainment of the conditions of human freedom, not only recovers the dualism between history and morality which undermines Kant's critical approach, but poses, despite Habermas's claims to the contrary, a linear and teleological interpretation of human historical development. We thus conclude that an answer to the

problem of orientation based on a theory of social evolution like Habermas's is incapable of actualising the potential that we identified in chapter three in Marx's materialist and emergentist approach for the production of a model of the species' history that captures its multi-linear and open-ended character. Instead, it falls back upon a modernist form of theorising which reveals a more involved perspective and remains unable to escape the society and time bound horizon of Western modernity. This conclusion leads us, in chapter six, to argue that the beginning of a more adequate approach to the problem of orientation can be found outside the critical theoretical tradition, in Elias's process sociology, whose materialist and emergentist approach to human development, focused on the sociological study of the empirical dynamics of the long-term history of the species, constitutes an alternative to Habermas's reconstruction of Marx's critical theory.

The present chapter is divided in three main sections. First, we address Habermas's observations on how human global interweaving produces a developmental problem to welfare states that undermines the degree of democratic control that their citizens are capable of exercising over systemic contexts. Second, we discuss the orientating function of Habermas's proposal for the political constitution of world society regarding how human beings can more consciously regulate the networks of their social interdependence and struck a better balance between the civilising and the reifying trends which accompany the latest stage in the global integration of the species. And finally, in the third section, we consider how our analysis of Habermas's work throughout these two chapters informs our inquiry into the problem of orientation.

### **1. Global interdependence and human control**

According to Habermas, the growth in human interdependence enables social areas integrated on the basis of strategic action to escape the democratic control of deliberative publics in welfare states, effectively abolishing the distinction between intra- and inter-societal processes and disturbing the balance between civilisation and reification in favour of the latter. This discussion sets the stage for our analysis, in the second section, of Habermas's proposal for the political constitution of world society as an orientating

framework regarding how this balance can be changed through an extension of the communicative control of the citizens of modern welfare states to the level of world politics.

In *'The Postnational Constellation'*, Habermas argues that the liberalisation of financial markets and capital movement integrates national economies into a global capitalist market that escapes the national control of welfare states.<sup>366</sup> With the growing intricacy of the global networks of capital flows, the autonomous systemic dynamics of capitalism are unleashed from the boundary conditions established by national democratic publics and become capable of developing of their own accord in conditions of greater autonomy. The capacity to freely move capital across the webs of the world economy means that, increasingly, important areas of society are submitted to relations on the basis of money as the main means of social integration.<sup>367</sup> This enables multinational companies to withhold investment in certain states or social areas – blocking access to important sources of revenue through taxation – unless states undergo reforms that make their internal conditions more adequate to the needs and interests of capitalist corporations. In particular, states are increasingly compelled to compete with each other in making themselves more attractive to global business interests, namely, through the privatisation of areas such as health and education, the reduction of workers' salaries, the extension of working hours, and a combination of increased taxes for citizens with a reduction of corporate taxes.<sup>368</sup> These policies imply that states' bureaucracies and governments, in responding to the imperatives of global capitalism, become predominantly a channel for the reification of national lifeworlds and for the distortion of their citizens' capacity to exercise democratic control over their conditions of existence.<sup>369</sup> Perceived as such, state representatives lose the democratic support of their citizens and face a combination of a legitimacy crisis with a public debt crisis, given the lack of funds to maintain the state's social functions.<sup>370</sup>

Furthermore, accompanying the growing intricacy of global economic networks are the cumulative processes of worldwide expansion of migration flows and, with them, the global dispersion of cultures, fashions and world-views, as well as epidemics, organised

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<sup>366</sup> Habermas, J. *The Postnational Constellation* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001), p. 49.

<sup>367</sup> Habermas, J. *The Postnational Constellation*, p. 78.

<sup>368</sup> Habermas, J. *The Postnational Constellation*, p. 79.

<sup>369</sup> Habermas, J. *The Postnational Constellation*, p. 79.

<sup>370</sup> For a detailed analysis of the legitimacy crisis that states face with the global expansion of capitalist networks see: Habermas, J. *Legitimation Crisis*.



crime and terrorism.<sup>371</sup> As such, welfare states find themselves 'enmeshed in the dependencies of an increasingly interconnected world society' whose systemic contexts 'effortlessly bypass territorial boundaries'.<sup>372</sup> They become bound together in relations of shared vulnerability to the unplanned processes arising out of the global networks of human interdependence in their various dimensions.

Growing global interdependence thus creates a developmental problem that exhausts the adaptive capacity of welfare states and shifts the balance between civilising and reifying trends in human development. In light of Habermas's theory of social evolution, such a situation demands the development of a new principle of social organisation for welfare states and world politics which expands states' adaptive capacity and recovers people's ability to exert democratic control over the systemic contexts that have now become global.<sup>373</sup> Habermas's analysis thus highlights how, for the first time in the history of the species, people face the need to learn how to become detached from the more involved and parochial points of view of their self-regarding political communities in order to produce a new principle of social organisation which matches the condition of human global interdependence.<sup>374</sup> This new principle should ensure the institutional embodiment of a more cosmopolitan perspective both at the state level and at the level of regional and global associations of states, on the basis of which forms of post-national democracy can be

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<sup>371</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?' in *The Divided West* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2006), p. 175. David Held shares Habermas's diagnosis of the diminishing capacity of welfare states to secure democratic self-determination by identifying three features of globalisation. First, he refers the way in which growing economic, political, legal, military and cultural interconnectedness escapes the regulatory ability of welfare states. Second, he notes how this interconnectedness creates unplanned chains of interlocking political decisions and outcomes that undermine the autonomy of national political systems themselves. And third, he refers to the way in which cultural and political identities are reshaped and rekindled by such processes, leading to many local and regional groups questioning the nation-state as a representative and accountable power system. See: Held, D. *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995), p. 136.

<sup>372</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 175. In a similar vein, Robert Walker mentions the 'disjunction' between global structures and processes that have profound impact on people everywhere, such as global flows of capital, new information technologies or global environmental problems, and the territorially defined and separated centres of political authority in the form of welfare states. See: Walker, R. *One World, Many Worlds: Struggles for a Just World Peace* (London, Zed Books, 1988).

<sup>373</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 155.

<sup>374</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 176. As Linklater argues, the transnational forms of harm that accompany the growing global interconnection of the species underline the point that political communities can no longer exercise their power of self-determination without considering their duties to other human beings. As such, in conditions of global interdependence, territorially bounded polities are compelled to 'widen' the boundaries of 'moral and political community' to engage outsiders in dialogue about matters which affect their vital interests. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 84.

developed which ensure not only a greater degree of inter-state cooperation, but also the extension of the communicative power of deliberative publics to world politics in a manner that extends peoples' powers of conscious control over the unplanned dynamics of global systemic contexts. Effectively, such a principle of social organisation would promote the projection, beyond states' boundaries, of the civilising process which has already been taking place in the context of welfare states.

However, Habermas's writings on world politics, especially those concerned with the Iraq War, can also be read as indicating that more involved and society bound perspectives continue to block the path towards the development of more cosmopolitan forms of orientation amongst human beings. In particular, his observations on the hegemonic behaviour of the United States of America and its competition with other emergent and resurgent great powers, such as China or Russia, point to a permanence of behavioural patterns in world politics which intensify rather than address the developmental problem posed by global interdependence.<sup>375</sup> The continued reliance of the great powers on their military, technological and economic superiority to create a global order compatible with their more ethnocentric interests constitutes an expression of the historical possibility for the emergence of what Habermas calls an 'imperial alternative' to the collective regulation of the global web of humanity.<sup>376</sup> According to Habermas, the most likely future outcome of this alternative is the progressive emergence of a 'Schmittian' global order, characterized by the 'alarming prospect of competition among hemispheres'.<sup>377</sup> In his view, such a global order would, in effect, undermine the possibility of collective control over the process of globalisation, as the unplanned dynamics arising out of great power competition would push people and states into patterns of interaction not intended by any of them, and with potentially harmful implications for all the participants.<sup>378</sup>

In this context, Habermas's project for the political constitution of world society can be understood as an attempt to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition which orientates people as to how they can detach from the more involved points of view of their societies locked in competitive struggles and rather promote a transformation of world politics which expands people's collective capacity to regulate the

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<sup>375</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 148.

<sup>376</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 149.

<sup>377</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 148.

<sup>378</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 148.

unplanned dynamics of their global interdependence. As we argue in the next section, this project is presented in its most developed version in the book *'The Crisis of the European Union: A Response'* which deals with how the long-term process of civilisation which has been developing at the state level can continue at the level of world politics.<sup>379</sup> In particular, Habermas can be read as arguing that a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition must underline international efforts to pacify relations between states and regulate their anarchic competition for power. Furthermore, such pacification is a fundamental condition for the development of a new principle of social organisation for world politics which entails the establishment of post-national procedures and institutions – as well as new forms of solidarity between human beings organised as different state societies – on the basis of which a higher degree of democratic control can be exercised over global systemic dynamics.<sup>380</sup>

## **2. The political constitution of world society**

In essays such as *'Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace: At Two Hundred Years' Historical Remove'* and *'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?'*, Habermas characterises his project for the political constitution of world society as a reconstruction of Kant's project for perpetual peace in light of the innovations that have occurred in the legal domestication of state power since Kant's time.<sup>381</sup> He argues that Kant adopts the proposal for a non-coercive and voluntary League of Nations as a 'surrogate' to the ideal transcendental model of a world federation as a consequence of Kant's realistic recognition that states would not accept any compromise of their absolute sovereignty.<sup>382</sup> However, in Habermas's assessment, the League of Nations concedes too much autonomy to state sovereignty and ignores the possibility of controlling the arbitrary power of states through the reinforcement of the inherent legitimacy and compelling character of international law via the extension of the democratic influence of deliberative publics to the level of world politics.<sup>383</sup> In particular, Habermas observes that the process of legal domestication of state

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<sup>379</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. ix.

<sup>380</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European*, p. 10.

<sup>381</sup> Habermas, J. *'Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace: At Two Hundred Years' Historical Remove'*.

<sup>382</sup> Habermas, J. *'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?'*, p. 128.

<sup>383</sup> Habermas, J. *'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?'*, p. 136.

power through international law, and in particular the innovations that have occurred at the level of international criminal law since Kant's time, open the way for an alternative model to Kant's League of Nations. They demonstrate that, even in the absence of a supranational monopoly of violence ensuring the application of international law, states frequently and voluntarily comply with it as a consequence of their recognition of its inherent legitimacy as an embodiment of not only inter-state strategic agreements but also of principles which are assumed to hold universal validity to all human beings and which have already been the result of a long historical process of consensualization within and between republican states. At the level of world politics there thus occurs what Habermas calls a 'decoupling' of law and state power.<sup>384</sup>

In this context, Habermas refers to the United Nations (UN) charter which, while recognising the principle of 'sovereign equality' in Article 2, also grants the organisation, in Article 7, the right to intervene in states in the name of international security or, more recently, the protection of the human rights of citizens of failing states or who are subject to the threat of criminal governments.<sup>385</sup> According to Habermas, the charter thus implies not only that member-states of the UN have come to grant the Security Council the 'competence to protect the rights of their citizens against their own governments', but also that it is becoming increasingly more adequate to describe the world organisation as 'a community of states and citizens'.<sup>386</sup> In Habermas's assessment, these innovations in international law and its applicability show that it is possible to curtail the autonomy of state sovereignty – and even open the way for international intervention envisioning the protection of human rights – without a world state. Instead, the domestication of world politics can be achieved through a reinforcement of the legitimacy of international law by making its constitution dependent not only on decision-making processes between sovereign states but also on deliberative consensualization between world citizens.<sup>387</sup>

Following these observations, Habermas argues that a non-coercive and voluntary League of Nations is not the only alternative to a world federation of states.<sup>388</sup> Rather, the cosmopolitan condition envisioned by Kant can be achieved through the political

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<sup>384</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 134.

<sup>385</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 135.

<sup>386</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 135.

<sup>387</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 134.

<sup>388</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 134.

constitution of world society in the form of a multi-level political organisation which encompasses all possible levels of human interdependence and which, while lacking the character of a world state, is 'embedded within the framework of a world organisation with the power to impose peace and implement human rights'.<sup>389</sup> Habermas proposes that different competencies should fall into each of these levels. Hence, the supranational level of the UN should be circumscribed to functions of securing peace and promoting human rights while the intermediate transnational level should address 'global domestic problems' such as the regulation of the capitalist global economy and the protection of non-human nature.<sup>390</sup> As Habermas notes, at the present historical juncture only great powers such as the United States of America, Russia or China have the necessary capacity to operate at the transnational level and establish continental regimes regulating economic, social and environmental policies in their respective areas of the globe. Consequently, in order to further give shape to this politically constituted world society, states in the various regions of the world would have to unite to form continental regimes 'on the model of the European Union'.<sup>391</sup> Moreover, each of these levels needs to be regulated by international norms which are constituted on the basis of deliberative processes involving both the states and the citizens who stand to be affected by them. In this manner, Habermas guarantees that they possess the required legitimacy to curtail the arbitrary autonomy of state sovereignty and that the national lifeworlds of each state are able to extend their communicative control over systemic contexts, such as the global economy and the inter-state system, which have escaped the regulatory capacity of welfare states. Habermas's proposal for the political constitution of world society thus inaugurates a new principle of social organisation for world politics on the basis of which the developmental problem posed by human global interdependence can be solved.

From the point of view of our inquiry into the problem of orientation, Habermas's writings on world politics can thus be understood as striving to achieve a more cosmopolitan perspective which matches the reality of human global interdependence and which is capable of promoting a growing detachment in peoples' points of view away from the more parochial interests of their self-regarding political communities. It strives to

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<sup>389</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 136.

<sup>390</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 136.

<sup>391</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 136.

orientate people towards a more adequate assessment of both the potentials and the limits for the expansion of human self-determination, and to a better understanding of what transformations human political institutions need to undergo in order for the species to achieve a truly cosmopolitan condition which enables human beings to alter the balance between planned and unplanned social processes and thus extend their capacity to consciously regulate their conditions of existence.

The next two subsections are dedicated to a more in-depth discussion of how Habermas's proposal for the political constitution of world society fulfils this orientating function. The first subsection is focused on Habermas's work on the European Union – which, according to him, should serve as the model for the constitution of regional associations of states that fulfil the tasks attributed to the transnational level of the multi-level world society – while the second subsection addresses his proposal for the reform of the United Nations.

## **2.1. The European model**

According to Habermas, the political constitution of world society requires that states in the various regions of the world enter into continental associations which carry out functions regarding the regulation of the social, economic and environmental conditions of human existence in their respective areas of the globe. These continental unions must be based on the model of the European Union given that it is the longest existent effort at extending the civilising process initiated within states to the international level.<sup>392</sup> As Habermas observes, this civilising effort has been developed in order to not only pacify the inter-state relations of a continent 'drenched in blood' but also to develop decision-making and steering capacities beyond the state level, which enable European states to collectively exercise a

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<sup>392</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 136. According to Beardsworth, the 'post-national' innovations taking place in the EU will, in time, serve as a reference for other, less integrated, regional institutions. The fact that European law is obeyed and has 'its own consistency' independently of 'hard domestic law and state interest' sets a 'precedent' for regional and global politics, effectively posing a historically new relation between law, force and interest. This new relation provides a new model for political organisation at the regional and global levels under 'conditions of increasing social differentiation and universal coordination'. See: Beardsworth, R. *Cosmopolitanism and International Relations Theory*, p. 94.

greater degree of collective control over both the systemic dynamics of inter-societal relations and of the capitalist world economy.<sup>393</sup>

However, Habermas also notes that this civilising process is far from finished insofar as the pacification of inter-state relations and the development of European decision-making institutions have not been matched by their concomitant democratization.<sup>394</sup> Decision-making processes at the level of the EU continue to be shaped predominantly by strategic action, i.e. by relations of power between states that escape the influence of national public spheres while producing decisions that have a profound effect in the conditions of existence of the populations of each state. Hence, Habermas claims that European law, while enabling the self-regulation of the European system of states, frequently lacks legitimacy in the eyes of European citizens, given how it violates the 'all-affected principle' of discourse ethics, in the sense that it is not constituted by deliberative processes of consensualization between all those who stand to be affected by it.<sup>395</sup> In Habermas's assessment, the present character of the EU is thus better described as a form of 'executive federalism', in which the European Council, composed of representatives of each state, enacts measures that are implemented at the national level through governmental majorities that disempower national parliaments and escape the control of deliberative national publics.<sup>396</sup> As such, national state systems can use European institutions to escape the regulation of national public spheres, and recover a degree of

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<sup>393</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 28.

<sup>394</sup> In this context, Peter Verovšek observes that, to Habermas, one of the main challenges facing the European Union is the fact that its economic integration has not been matched by the creation of democratic political institutions capable of regulating the Common Market. Its continued reliance on economic interdependence driven by business interests as the main integrative and pacifying force on the continent is 'no longer acceptable' without a concomitant effort to match the logic of market efficiency with the recognition of common political ties and the democratization of European political institutions. See: Verovšek, P. 'Meeting Principles and Lifeworlds Halfway: Jürgen Habermas on the Future of Europe', *Political Studies*, 60: 2 (2012) p. 369ff.

<sup>395</sup> Habermas's position regarding the all-affected principle has been further developed to a consideration of world politics under growing networks of human interconnectedness by Fraser, who argues that there is a need to 'transnationalise' public spheres. Fraser considers that national public spheres need to incorporate non-national individuals, including those outside of the state's territory, whenever a decision taken by the democratic polity might affect them in any way, so that they can express their specific needs and validity claims regarding that decision. Fraser thus calls for the development of communicative communities with flexible boundaries, expressed in shifting transnational public spheres in accordance with the all-affected principle, as the only way to guarantee the continued efficacy of collective democratic control over social conditions in the context of highly complex and intricate webs of global interdependence. See: Fraser, N. 'Transnationalising the Public Sphere', pp. 7-30. For a discussion of Fraser's argument and its relation with Habermas's position see: Linklater, A. 'Public Spheres and Civilising Processes', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24: 4 (2007) pp. 31-37.

<sup>396</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 28.

systemic autonomy from the normative constraints of national lifeworlds. Habermas thus sees the EU as a highly contradictory social formation. On the one hand, it has contributed to the pacification of European inter-state relations and to the development of European institutions with the capacity to extend legal and democratic control over systemic contexts which have overcome national boundaries. But, on the other hand, these same institutions reinforce the autonomy of state power vis-à-vis national lifeworlds and diminish the level of collective democratic control that people are capable of exercising over it. The EU thus appears as an arrangement for exercising a 'kind of post-democratic, bureaucratic rule'.<sup>397</sup>

However, Habermas also observes that the development of European institutions and the legal pacification of the continent have established the historical conditions for the possibility of extending democratic decision-making to the transnational level of world society. Such an extension would permit the constitution of a European 'transnational democracy' that further approximates the actualization of the ideal universal communication community of discourse ethics by institutionally embodying the all-affected principle.<sup>398</sup> The main difficulty facing the democratization of the EU, Habermas argues, is that except for a still weak European Parliament, democratic institutions of decision-making continue predominantly tied to the state level. In this context, Habermas recalls the argument advanced by authors such as Dieter Grimm, according to whom the democratization of the EU is impossible given the absence of a common European identity that could create bonds of solidarity between European citizens and permit them to form a single constitutional subject. As Habermas observes, this argument – characterized as the 'no demos thesis' – 'is based on the assumption that only a nation united by a shared language, tradition, and history can provide the necessary basis for a political community'.<sup>399</sup> Nonetheless, the no demos thesis can be contested in light of Habermas's

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<sup>397</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 52. The 'dialectical' character of the European Union is highlighted by Shivdeep Grewal who argues that the EU expresses a 'paradox' to the extent that it shows marked tendencies for a deepening of its 'democratic deficit' while also gathering the potential to serve as a 'vehicle' for the extension of democratic governance beyond the nation state and for the limitation of the 'socially corrosive impact of globalisation. See: Grewal, S. 'The Paradox of Integration: Habermas and the Unfinished Project of European Union', *Politics*, 21: 2 (2001) pp. 114-123.

<sup>398</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 52.

<sup>399</sup> Habermas, J. 'Is the Development of a European Identity Necessary, and Is It Possible?' in *The Divided West*, p.76. For more on the 'no demos thesis', see: Dahl, R. 'Can International Organisation be Democratic? A Sceptic's View' in *Democracy's Edges*, edited by Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 19-36 and Grimm, D. 'Does Europe Need a Constitution?', *European Law Journal*, 1: 3 (1995) pp. 282-302.



theory of social evolution by noting that the post-conventional world-views of the citizens of modern states already hold the cognitive potential to overcome the nation as the main principle of social organisation for the constitution of political community.<sup>400</sup>

As seen in the previous chapter, Habermas considers that post-conventional perspectives make the validity of social norms dependent on the extent to which these derive from universal principles that have been constituted in deliberative processes of consensualization involving all those who stand to be affected by them. This deliberative character of the validity of law, according to Habermas, implies a decoupling in people's perspectives of law and decision-making processes from the background of shared national traditions. From a post-conventional point of view, decision-making processes concerning common problems 'are addressed in light of principles of justice rather than in terms of the fate of the nation', given how people's 'emotional fixation' moves from the national state to the deliberatively constituted law.<sup>401</sup> Increasingly, civic solidarity can be defined not by belonging to a shared national state, but instead by a common allegiance to deliberatively-achieved constitutional principles embodied in law.<sup>402</sup> Habermas calls this post-conventional emotional connection with the principles of law, 'constitutional patriotism'.<sup>403</sup>

Constitutional patriotism can thus be understood as a fundamental aspect of the new principle of social organisation for world politics to the extent that it guarantees the possibility of the historical emergence of new and more detached forms of attunement between people, characterised by an expansion of solidarity beyond the frontiers of a particular nation. Habermas's observations on constitutional patriotism thus serve an orientating function to the citizens of European states towards the potential that is already immanent in their post-conventional world-views for the development of more cosmopolitan perspectives on the basis of which a European-wide civic solidarity can be

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<sup>400</sup> Habermas, J. 'Is the Development of a European Identity Necessary, and Is It Possible?', p. 76. See also: Habermas, J. 'Does Europe Need a Constitution?' in *Times of Transition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) pp.89-110 and Habermas, J. 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures', p. 115.

<sup>401</sup> Habermas, J. 'Is the Development of a European Identity Necessary, and Is It Possible?', p. 77-78.

<sup>402</sup> As Linklater notes, an enlarged civic solidarity on the basis of deliberative achieved constitutional principles implies an 'enlargement of the boundaries of political community' to engage non-nationals as equals in open dialogue. Progressively, membership of wider communication communities comes to rest not on the presumption of shared cultural orientations or political aspirations, but rather on the recognition that cultural differences are no barrier to equal rights of participation in a dialogic community of co-legislators. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 85.

<sup>403</sup> Habermas, J. 'Is the Development of a European Identity Necessary, and Is It Possible?', p. 77. See also: Habermas, J. *The Postnational Constellation*, p. 74ff.

developed which unites individuals from different states on the basis of a shared allegiance to the principles of European law, which they collectively recognise as legitimate and valid if these principles are derived from deliberative processes of decision-making involving all of those that stand to be affected by them.<sup>404</sup>

In this context, Habermas argues that the European Union can already be understood as partially actualizing the cognitive potential of modern post-conventional world-views. This is particularly expressed, Habermas observes, in the December 2007 Lisbon treaty which recognises both the national peoples (represented by their states), and the citizens of the EU as its constitutional subjects.<sup>405</sup> In Habermas's view, the Lisbon treaty thus confirms *de jure* what the EU has historically denied *de facto*; i.e. that the legitimacy of European law arises from its constitution involving both the citizens and the member-states of the union. Consequently, Habermas argues that the transformation of the EU into a transnational democracy can be brought about if the union turns its legal notion of a 'dual

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<sup>404</sup> Habermas's work on constitutional patriotism has been further developed in the context of his reflections on post-secularism. According to Habermas, in the same manner that post-conventional world-views open the way for constitutional patriotism, i.e. for political communities based on collective allegiance to processes of deliberative consensualization rather than on more exclusivist attachments to particularistic conceptions of the nation, they also imply the possibility of a post-secular orientation regarding the debates surrounding multiculturalism and religious diversity. Post-secularism is expressed in the recognition that the modern commitment to the embodiment of the principles of discourse ethics in social institutions entails a willingness on the part of secular citizens to also include in the deliberation processes of social norms the religiously-informed perspectives of individuals and communities who do not reproduce the type of secular world-views which have come to be identified with modernity in the West. On the other hand, it also implies that these religious communities, in order to be participants in these processes of democratic will formation, need to not only superficially adjust to the constitutional order but also appropriate the post-conventional commitment to discourse ethics under the premises of their own faith as well as recognise the need to maintain a separation between the state and the church. As Habermas argues, post-secularism requires a 'complementary learning process', involving both religious and secular mentalities, as religious and secular citizens recognise that the regulation of collective social life, on which their capacity to self-determine the social norms under which they live is premised, entails the need to include all perspectives which might be affected by a decision in common process of deliberative consensualization. In this manner, Habermas considers that post-secularism supersedes the debate between extreme positions of multiculturalism and secularism. The former's argument about the 'incommensurability' of world-views and the need to recognize collective rights to religious communities entails a danger of trampling individual rights and individual self-determination. While the latter's defence of the Enlightenment values of reason and lack of validity of religious dogma, by excluding from public debate religious world-views, ends up establishing exclusionary practices that go against the very basis of modern citizenship. Post-secularism can thus be said to express a more adequate involvement-detachment balance between the universalistic orientations inherent in discourse ethics and a more involved recognition and protection of human difference, showing how these two aspects are complementary and mutually implied in post-conventional world-views, rather than expressive of an incommensurable dualism. See: Habermas, J. 'Notes on Post-Secular Society', *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 25: 4 (2008) pp. 17-29 and Habermas, J. *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008).

<sup>405</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 37.

constitutional subject' into an institutional reality.<sup>406</sup> As Habermas observes, the institutional apparatus required for the actualization of this dual constitutional subject already exists, in the form of European citizenship and institutions such as the European Parliament and the European Council. What is required is that these institutions embody the cognitive potential present in post-conventional world-views by establishing a European-wide 'two-track' decision-making process, which enables individuals, both in their quality of European citizens and of citizens of their respective national states, to participate – respectively in the Parliament and the Council – in the constitution of European law.<sup>407</sup>

This scenario implies that the 'same persons' would embody these two roles in 'personal union'.<sup>408</sup> As such, individuals would need to be aware that they are required to adopt 'different justice perspectives' depending on which of the two decision-making tracks is involved. What counts as a 'public interest' in deliberative processes which they undertake as citizens of a state would change into a 'particularistic interest' in deliberative processes which they undertake as European citizens.<sup>409</sup> This tension, Habermas observes, arises from the dual character of the decision-making process, and would have important consequences for the democratic character of the European Union. On the one hand, the fact that European law would derive from deliberative processes of decision-making involving the citizens of the European Union would ensure its democratic legitimacy and reinforce its compelling power to regulate inter-state relations, even in the absence of a European monopoly over the means of violence. Furthermore, it would also expand the degree of control that European citizens would be capable of exercising over the systemic contexts affecting the European continent – be it those of inter-state relations or those of the capitalist market – to the extent that the European law regulating those contexts would be an expression of democratic deliberative processes instead of only the outcome of the strategic calculations of national states. On the other hand, the fact that the dual

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<sup>406</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 37. In this context, John McCormick observes that the main challenge facing the democratisation of the European Union is not so much at the level of formal institutions but rather a matter of 'substantive politics'. It involves the need to seize the potential which is already immanent in the EU's institutional apparatus by 'filling it with life' through the fostering of a 'sociological basis' that includes embedding the EU institutions in processes of deliberative consensualization and will-formation involving the European citizens and member-states. See: McCormick, J. *Weber, Habermas and the Transformation of the European State: Constitutional, Social and Supranational Democracy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 209.

<sup>407</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 28.

<sup>408</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 28.

<sup>409</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 37.

constitutional subject of the EU would be composed not only by European citizens but also by the states of the Union means that European law would not be able to subordinate the national constitutional laws and modes of life of each state. Each state would be capable of safeguarding its own internal legal and normative framework by ensuring that European law satisfied the standards of civil liberties that have already been historically achieved at the national level.<sup>410</sup> Hence, European law would embody both the more cosmopolitan perspectives of European citizens, and protect the difference of the several cultural biotypes of each one of the national peoples of the Union.<sup>411</sup>

Habermas can thus be read in this context as striving to develop a means of orientation on the basis of his theory of social evolution which not only achieves but also promotes a more adequate involvement–detachment balance in people’s perspectives. In particular, he seeks to orientate human beings as to how the cosmopolitan potential of their post-conventional world-views can be actualised in a manner that enables them to bring under greater control the dynamics of their global interdependence, while still preserving the more particularistic expressions of human difference embodied in their respective political communities. In this manner, Habermas can be seen here as striving for a more adequate response to the problem of orientation, capable of achieving a truly cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition that encompasses both the unity of the species and the diversity and multiple forms of human self-expression and self-determination. However, as we argue in the last section of this chapter, despite Habermas’s work highlighting the need for such a perspective and how political organisations built on the basis of the notion of a dual constitutional subject might point the way for its actualisation in world politics, still, his theory of social evolution locks him in a linear and teleological conception of human development which ultimately undermines his capacity to maintain this perspective and the adequacy of his theoretical framework as a means of orientation.

According to Habermas, the transformation of the European Union into a transnational democratic association of states and citizens would constitute a ‘further step’ in the political constitution of world society and in the extension of the civilising process to the level of world politics by enabling deliberative publics to acquire a greater degree of collective and conscious control over the systemic dynamics of inter-state and global

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<sup>410</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 40.

<sup>411</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 40.

economic relations which have escaped their control within welfare states.<sup>412</sup> Democratically-constituted European law would be the means through which European citizens might circumscribe the international behaviour of states within normatively acceptable and deliberatively consensualized boundaries, in a manner that would open the way for the further pacification and regulation of the unplanned social processes arising from anarchic inter-state competition. Moreover, it would ideally enable European citizens to also tame global capitalism by establishing legal boundaries delimiting the operation of transnational markets on the continent, and by developing European social measures to protect both citizens and states from the unplanned dynamics of capitalist development.<sup>413</sup>

In relation to this last point, Habermas mentions the possibility for the future development of continent-wide social policies that substitute the social security functions previously undertaken at the level of welfare states, and which envision the elimination of the 'fault lines' separating rich and poor nations as well as the progressive 'uniformity' of living standards between countries.<sup>414</sup> This uniformity could further reinforce European civic solidarity, especially if coupled with the progressive development of a European public sphere complementing the representation of European citizens and states in the decision-making institutions of the EU. According to Habermas, an European public sphere would constitute the arena in which European citizens could engage in deliberative processes regarding European law and the development of the European project which would lead people to take each other's points of view in a manner that might reinforce their capacity to attain a more detached perspective on their conditions of existence and develop forms of mutual emotional identification and civic solidarity which overcome the frontiers of their particular political communities. In Habermas's view, an European public sphere does not need to substitute national public spheres, but would rather complement them by being

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<sup>412</sup> Building upon Habermas's theory of communicative action and its application to the study of world politics, Linklater notes how Habermas's work opens the way for a 'post-Westphalian' conception of political community which widens its boundaries beyond the territorially defined national state to ensure 'due consideration' of outsiders, and move beyond the supposition that differences between people is a good reason for privileging the interests of insiders only. At the same time, post-Westphalian communities, in keeping with their own communicative principles of organisation, have a 'duty' to recognise that other human beings may not wish to become 'entangled' in their arrangements and might opt for a 'separate existence'. In this manner, argues Linklater, post-Westphalian societies might be able to promote both 'greater universality' and 'greater diversity' by striving to 'balance the recognition of deep diversity with the ideal of transnational citizenship. Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, pp. 167-176.

<sup>413</sup> Habermas, J. *The Postnational Constellation* p. 54.

<sup>414</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 52.

developed through the 'opening up' of national public spheres to each other. This would involve a greater coverage, by news outlets, of European issues in national public spheres, but also more 'reports on the political positions and controversies that the same topics evoke in other member states'.<sup>415</sup>

However, as we discuss in the next subsection, Habermas considers that regional organisations constituted according to the model of an European Union transformed into a transnational democracy can only enable the expansion of human self-determination in relation to global social processes if framed at the supranational level by a world organisation responsible for imposing peace and promoting respect for human rights.

## 2.2. The cosmopolitan condition

According to Habermas, the civilising function of democratic legal control over systemic contexts across national borders derives its impetus from a 'paralysing constellation' in world politics.<sup>416</sup> The globalisation of human interdependence has led to the 'exhaustion' of the adaptive capacity of human beings organised as states to answer the developmental problems posed by global inter-state competition and capitalism, which have developed 'beyond the control of even the most powerful states'.<sup>417</sup> As such, transnational efforts at democratic legal regulation such as those of the European Union need to be complemented by a world organisation operating at the supranational level which integrates regional attempts for an expansion of human control over global systemic dynamics.<sup>418</sup>

In this context, Habermas notes that such a supranational organisation is fundamental for the attainment of a truly cosmopolitan condition which politically matches the reality of human global interdependence and enables human beings to bring under

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<sup>415</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 48. Fraser raises several questions regarding the capacity of national media to thematise European or transnational issues. In particular, she argues that the combination of increased corporate control over media outlets, the proliferation of niche media, the decentred character of online media, and also the predominantly monolingual character of global media – whose predominance of English, on the one hand, serves as a *lingua franca* enabling communication but, on the other hand, also exposes fundamental political fault lines by being the language privileged by global business, academic and entertainment elites – might all contribute to undermine Habermas's attributed role to media outlets in the consolidation of transnational public spheres. See: Fraser, N. 'Transnationalising the Public Sphere', p. 18ff.

<sup>416</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 54.

<sup>417</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 54.

<sup>418</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 55.

greater collective and conscious control the unplanned social processes which arise from their species-wide interconnection. Essential in this context, Habermas observes, is that this world organisation operates a 'transition' of international law to cosmopolitan law.<sup>419</sup> As we saw in chapter two, Kant's proposal for a League of Nations places cosmopolitan law as a complement to international law, in the sense that it regulates state interactions with individuals possessing the status of world citizens, and it is constituted by decision-making processes between the member-states of the League. Habermas comes instead to argue that cosmopolitan law should supersede international law by being constituted through decision-making processes involving not only states but also world citizens, in their role as constitutional subjects of the world organisation. This dual constitutionalization of cosmopolitan law, Habermas argues, would grant it a higher degree of democratic legitimacy than current international law and thus reinforce its compelling power next to states in a manner that might not only diminish their arbitrary power over post-national legal frameworks but also reinforces the legitimacy of the international organisation to intervene in states which violate cosmopolitan law by threatening peace or committing crimes against human rights. As such, Habermas argues that in the same manner that international law should be transformed into European law in the context of the EU by being constituted by both its member-states and European citizens, so too it must be transformed into cosmopolitan law in the context of the United Nations. World politics would thus transition to a true cosmopolitan condition, as the world organisation would enact norms that would be the product of processes of deliberative consensualization between the world's states and world citizens, and thus historically approximate the actualisation of the principles of discourse ethics and its projection of an ideal universal communication community.<sup>420</sup> The UN would have to institutionally embody, at the supranational level, the

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<sup>419</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 137.

<sup>420</sup> Habermas, J. 'Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?', p. 141. Habermas's arguments regarding the cosmopolitan transformation of world politics in part echo those of the proponents of cosmopolitan democracy. However, Habermas's proposal for the political constitution of world society exhibits a greater degree of analytical nuance than the majority of authors on cosmopolitan democracy which is expressed in his connection between the reconfiguration of democratic politics into a form of multi-level deliberative governance and the transformation of people's perspectives and basic modes of attunement towards each other and the world, as an outcome of his more comprehensive understanding of the role of the triad of controls in the long-term process of human development. For more on cosmopolitan democracy, see: Held, D. *Democracy and the Global Order*; Held, D. 'Democracy, From City-states to a Cosmopolitan Order?' *Prospects for Democracy: North, South, East, West*, edited by David Held (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1993) pp.

two innovations that characterize the transnational level of the EU, and are made possible by the cognitive potential present in modern post-conventional world-views and consciousness structures. On the one hand, it would have to ensure the compliance of member states with cosmopolitan law even though the monopolies over the means of legitimate violence remain at state level. And, on the other hand, it would have to institutionally embody a dual constitutional subject, composed of both world citizens and national peoples (represented by their respective states, or by other representative entities, such as NGO's, in the case of sub-state or stateless peoples).<sup>421</sup> The civilising effect of Habermas's envisioned constitutionalization of world society thus relies heavily on a combination between states' self-restraint and voluntary respect for a cosmopolitan law with reinforced legitimacy, the pressures of world public opinion and inter-state relations, and the capacity of the world organisation to intervene in states that threaten this cosmopolitan condition. Fundamental in this context is the development of more cosmopolitan orientations both at the state level and at the level of individual personality structures that better attune people to the long chains of interdependence in which their actions are enmeshed and underline practices of deliberative consensualization of the universal principles and behavioural expectations that should be observed in their context. These more detached orientations would promote less ethnocentric political communities and reinforce greater self-restraint on part of states as well as enable their citizens to step back from their more involved attachments to the nation-state to evaluate, support or condemn their states' behaviour in accordance with more universalistic standards.

According to Habermas, the decoupling of law and state power can already be discerned in the current institutional framework of the United Nations while the actualisation of a dual constitutional subject requires the attribution to every single human being on the planet of the status of world citizen and the constitution, parallel with the General Assembly, of a world parliament composed of their elected representatives.<sup>422</sup> Habermas maintains that the world parliament would not transform the United Nations into a world republic, but would reinforce the democratic legitimacy of cosmopolitan law by making world citizens, alongside with states, one of its two constitutional subjects.

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13-52 and Archibugi, D. *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Toward Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>421</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 54.

<sup>422</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 54-58.



Furthermore, in the same manner as what would occur at the level of an EU transformed into a transnational democracy, cosmopolitan law would not subordinate national state law or modes of life. On the one hand, member states, as the second constitution-founding subject, would be able to protect their internal orders from cosmopolitan law that did not meet the standards of civil liberties that have already been historically achieved at the state level.<sup>423</sup> On the other hand, the lack of a supranational monopoly over the means of violence means that the world organisation would have to rely on 'national monopolists' in the fulfilment of its tasks, including those envisioning the implementation of coercive measures in order to sanction the violation of cosmopolitan law.<sup>424</sup> According to Habermas, the need for the world organisation to rely on member-states in this manner not only confirms the decoupling between law and state power that characterizes the political constitution of world society but also further ensures the protection of the autonomy of states through the maintenance of the monopoly over the means of violence at the state level. Habermas's proposal for the political constitution of world society at the supranational level thus exhibits once again an attempt to produce a means of orientation which achieves an involvement–detachment balance that simultaneously actualises the cosmopolitan attunement of world citizens with post-conventional world-views, while protecting and safeguarding the difference of their more particularistic cultural self-expressions and more involved emotional attachments to their historical political communities.<sup>425</sup>

In this context, and as already mentioned, Habermas argues that the world organisation must restrict itself to the tasks of maintaining peace and protecting human rights, leaving decision-making processes related to economic, social or ecological problems to the transnational level of world society.<sup>426</sup> The restriction of the UN to this narrow set of core functions derives from Habermas's argument that issues related to economic, social or

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<sup>423</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 58.

<sup>424</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 58.

<sup>425</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 61. According to Linklater, inherent in Habermas's notion of cosmopolitan citizenship, is a commitment to global arrangements that 'enlarge' the spheres of social interaction which are governed by dialogue rather than force. Habermas's proposal for the political constitution of world society thus 'weds together' the Kantian ideal of equal membership of a universal kingdom of ends, the Marxian project of dismantling systems of domination and exclusion that undermine human autonomy and the thesis that democratic communities of discourse can 'promote new relations between universality and difference'. See: Linklater, A. *The Transformation of Political Community*, p. 211.

<sup>426</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 60.

ecological problems, while expressing a 'shared abstract interest' of all human beings, necessarily imply answers that relate to particular conceptions of the 'good life'.<sup>427</sup> These are issues whose answers involve the self-affirmation of particular cultural and political identities and, as such, while admitting of collective answers between people who share common cultural characteristics – as part of their collective history and belonging to a particular region of the globe – they are not liable to be addressed by truly universal decisions arising from global processes of deliberation between world citizens.<sup>428</sup> Consequently, these issues should be dealt with at the transnational level, where continental unions of states in the same cultural areas can potentially come closer to common agreements on preferable 'ways of life'.<sup>429</sup> However, the same judgement does not apply to issues of world peace and human rights. In Habermas's view, these issues express an *a priori* general interest shared by the world's population 'beyond all political-cultural divisions' in the avoidance of violence and in the expression of solidarity with 'everything that has a human face'.<sup>430</sup> These issues thus have an inherently universal character, to the extent that shared human vulnerability to war and violence is a common feature of the species. As such, their discussion is liable to produce truly cosmopolitan answers, arrived at through global processes of consensualization of norms involving world citizens and all the states into which humankind is divided. The world organisation, Habermas argues, must thus restrict itself to these issues that admit of universally shared human interests.

The universal, species-wide, character of the core functions of the UN also means that the world organisation has different legitimacy requirements than the transnational level of continental unions. As Habermas argues, given that 'negative duties to refrain from justifiable human rights violations and wars of aggression are rooted in the core moral contents of all the major world religions and in the cultures they have shaped', global civic solidarity amongst world citizens can be based on these shared convictions and does not require a deeper collective commitment to a common conception of the 'good life', as occurs at the transnational level.<sup>431</sup> Consequently, the democratic assessment of the deliberative decision-making processes of the world parliament can be based only on the

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<sup>427</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 63.

<sup>428</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 63.

<sup>429</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 63.

<sup>430</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 64.

<sup>431</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 65.

‘expression of the, in essence morally justified, ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the supranational application of presumptively shared moral principles and norms’.<sup>432</sup> So, while the legitimacy of law at the transnational European level demands not only a dual constitutional subject but also the permanent discussion of transnational issues in a European public sphere, the weaker legitimacy requirements of cosmopolitan law do not demand the formation of a permanent global public sphere. They simply require the thematic and temporally circumscribed constitution of a global public ‘sparked intermittently by this or that major event without achieving structural permanence’.<sup>433</sup>

Our analysis of Habermas’s writings on the political constitution of world society clearly reveals the orientating function of his theory of social evolution when applied to the study of the dynamics of human development. It shows how this theory can be understood as a means of orientation that guides both Habermas’s explanatory analysis of the developmental problems posed by human global interdependence and his anticipatory answer regarding how to institutionally embody the cognitive potential of the post-conventional perspectives of modern citizens in the political institutions of world society in a manner that ensures the further historical actualisation of the principles of discourse ethics and its ideal projection of a universal communication community. In this context, we can argue that Habermas is attempting to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective which recognises and protects human difference and thus achieves a more adequate involvement–detachment balance that avoids the reproduction of modernist myths and their legitimisation of relations of domination and exclusion associated with more parochial and ethnocentric points of view. However, as the next section shows, despite Habermas’s efforts in this direction, his theory of social evolution is ultimately revealed as a barrier to his capacity to maintain this cosmopolitan perspective and undermines the adequacy of his work as an answer to the problem of orientation.

### 3. Orientation in history

Throughout this and the previous chapter we have highlighted several aspects of Habermas’s work which show us how a more adequate means of orientation might be

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<sup>432</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 65.

<sup>433</sup> Habermas, J. *The Crisis of the European Union*, p. 62.

produced which is capable of attaining a more cosmopolitan perspective regarding the conditions of existence of globalised humanity and how people might develop a greater degree of collective and conscious control over them. In particular, we have highlighted Habermas's capacity to combine Kantian and Marxian themes in a single grand narrative in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the triad of controls in the species' history. Moreover, our analysis also pointed to the way in which the political constitution of world society based on processes of deliberative consensualization of social norms at all levels human interdependence might orientate people to the attainment of more detached and less parochial world-views which are protective of difference and of more involved emotional attachments to particular political communities.

However, throughout these chapters we also observed that Habermas's writings reveal significant shortcomings which highlight why a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation cannot rely on a theory of social evolution and its distinction between the logic and the dynamics of human development. In this section, we return to these arguments with reference to two critiques of Habermas's work which are particularly instructive for our purposes. First, we return to Hutching's analysis of the problem of orientation to focus on her critique of Habermas and argue that his recovery of a transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation reproduces the problems, already addressed in chapter two, connected with Kant's critical approach. And second, we complement this argument with reference to Honneth and Joas's critique to argue that Habermas's reliance on a linear and teleological conception of the developmental logic of human competences constitutes an inadequate explanatory model of the species' history which is fundamentally incapable of reconnecting back to actual historical events. These two lines of argument ultimately express how Habermas's reconstruction of Marx's critical approach through a theory of social evolution is not only unable to actualise the latter's immanent potential for a non-transcendental, multi-linear and open-ended model of human development but also throws Habermas back upon a modernist form of theorising which undermines his work as an answer to the problem of orientation.

As indicated in chapter four, Habermas recovers a Kantian type of transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation in the form of discourse ethics and its ideal projection of a universal communication community. According to Habermas,

discourse ethics avoids the problems connected with Kant's own transcendental approach in at least two ways. First, it does not imply a dualism between ideal and empirical history. And second, it is not a monological standpoint but derives from intersubjective practices of deliberative assessment of validity claims. However, we also argued in that chapter that Habermas's claim to have overcome the shortcomings of Kant's approach should be questioned, a position shared with Hutchings in her work on the two authors.<sup>434</sup>

Hutchings considers that Habermas's transcendental normative approach becomes particularly problematic when he seeks to assess the possibility for the actualization of discourse ethics in the actual course of human historical development. According to Hutchings, Habermas seeks to avoid the pitfalls of Kantian philosophical history which only manages to close the gulf between the dimension of empirical history and the moral idea of the kingdom of ends by reading historical development 'as if' it is progressing towards the actualization of the ideal condition of freedom.<sup>435</sup> As we saw in chapter four, Habermas strives to avoid a similar approach through a theoretical distinction between the logic and the empirical dynamics of human historical development. In this manner, Habermas's theory of social evolution provides a logical framework of the several stages of development of moral-practical knowledge and social evolution that express the progressive disclosure of discourse ethics in people's world-views and social formations. This framework does not intend to be a portrayal of actual historical processes, but to simply orientate the analysis of empirical history in order to assess particular historical junctures for both their degree of approximation to the ideal communication community and for the cognitive potential they gather for its further actualization.

However, Hutchings notes that the distinction that Habermas relies on to overcome Kant's philosophy of history, between the logic and the dynamics of history, raises 'some problems of its own'.<sup>436</sup> In particular, the abstract logical framework of social evolution is incapable of justifying its own status as a means of orientation; if there is no guarantee that history will follow its logical direction how then can it be justified that it should provide the orientating standard on the basis of which the analysis of the dynamics of history should be

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<sup>434</sup> Hutchings, K. *Kant, Critique and Politics*, p. 67.

<sup>435</sup> Hutchings, K. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', p. 193.

<sup>436</sup> Hutchings, K. *Kant, Critique and Politics*, p. 71.

conducted?<sup>437</sup> As such, like with Kant's philosophy of history, Habermas's choice for the theory of social evolution as the framework through which to analyse empirical history depends only on the philosopher's subjective judgement. Furthermore, Hutchings argues, Habermas's attributed status to his theory of social evolution reproduces the relation between morality and history which is present in Kant's work. It relies 'on a particular relation between the empirical (...) and the moral (...) in which the latter is carried through, but also shapes, the former'.<sup>438</sup> The most problematic consequence of this relation is that historical analysis becomes necessarily oriented by an abstract and unilinear conception of the 'moral' path of social evolution, which claims universal validity. This means that, even though Habermas expressly recognises the multi-linear path of the empirical dynamics of human history, his analysis of the long-term process of human development is necessarily orientated by a unilinear and teleological conception of what is the 'progressive' sequence of stages that must be empirically reproduced in order to approximate the moral ideal of discourse ethics. Hence, Habermas's work, when read as a means of orientation, necessarily implies an evaluation of some human societies as more 'mature', 'progressive' or 'morally-adequate' than others, which are considered 'immature', 'morally backward' or even 'failed'.<sup>439</sup> Incidentally, modern Western democratic societies, which constitute Habermas's

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<sup>437</sup> Hutchings, K. *Kant, Critique and Politics*, p. 71.

<sup>438</sup> Hutchings, K. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', p. 195.

<sup>439</sup> Hutchings, K. 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', p. 196. In this context, it is important to refer Gilligan's critique of Kohlberg's conception of moral development and its relevance for Habermas's theory of communicative action. Gilligan argues that Kohlberg, and by implication Habermas, favours a 'morality of justice' based on abstract principles and impartiality from particular points of view. However, Gilligan notes that this universalistic morality is historically predominant in human interactions in the context of the public sphere and is characterised by a concern with the notion of 'generalised other' in a manner that ignores the welfare of 'concrete others'. In particular, it is dismissive of the parallel existence of an 'ethic of care' which has been predominant in the life of women and is centred on concerns for concrete people. Gilligan's considers that privileging a morality of justice inherently excludes the moral skills most developed in women. Her argument, which has been extended by other authors such as Benhabib, is that neither form of moral orientation should be granted evaluative superiority over the other, given how both are essential for a morality which is simultaneously universal and integrative of difference. As such, traditional dichotomies perpetrated in the works of Kant, Kohlberg or Habermas, between the public and the private, or the universal and the particular, need to be overcome to enable a moral orientation that combines both a morality of justice and an ethic of care. See: Gilligan, C. and Murphy, J. 'Moral Development in Late Adolescence and Adulthood: A critique and reconstruction of Kohlberg's theory', *Human Development*, 23: 2 (1980) pp. 77-104; Gilligan, C. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993). See also: Benhabib, S. 'The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory', *Praxis International*, 4 (1985) pp. 402-424. From the perspective of our conceptual framework, such moral orientation to which Gilligan and Benhabib aspire implies a more adequate involvement-detachment balance at the level of people's perspectives capable of combining a commitment to universalistic moral values detached from particularistic points of view and a more involved form of attunement to particular human beings and their specific needs and forms of self-expression.

‘home for thought’, are identified as being those which embody the so far highest stage of social and moral development and, consequently, as being the ‘most grown up’ parts of the world.<sup>440</sup> This has important implications for Habermas’s conception of human development in a long-term perspective, in the sense that it limits the range of possible ‘moral’ paths of development to the ‘temporal trajectory’ that has been undertaken by Western modernity, which serves as the ‘model’ of approximation to a moral condition that should be reproduced by other societies and cultures which still lie in the ‘past’ of modern Western ‘maturity’.<sup>441</sup> As Hutchings observes, Western political time becomes interpreted as ‘world-political time, the time that drives or leads (or must be treated *as if* it drives or leads) historical development’.<sup>442</sup>

As much can be understood from Habermas’s writings on world politics and in particular from his claim that the European Union provides the model which other continental unions should follow in order to approximate a condition of greater actualization of the cognitive potential of modernity, measured in the post-conventional world-views and consciousness structures of modern Western citizens. As such, even though Habermas’s writings on world politics show a deep concern with attaining a cosmopolitan perspective which recognises and protects the plurality of the human condition – as is evidenced by his proposal for political institutions with a dual constitutional subject and his insistence on leaving issues of economic, social and environmental problems to the transnational level of a multilevel world society given the existence of different cultural and ethical conceptions of the ‘good life’ – his normative horizon continues to reveal a more involved perspective, circumscribed by Western modernity and the ‘moral’ path of historical development it has undergone and which is expected to be emulated by other regions of the globe.

The second part of our critique of Habermas follows closely from the first. In their book *Social Action and Human Nature*, Honneth and Joas analyse Habermas’s argument that his theory of social evolution, with its distinction between the logic and the dynamics of human development, ‘no longer has to assume the burden of proof for an actually existing, gradual process of social progress (...) but only has to demonstrate the logical necessity of

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<sup>440</sup> Hutchings, K. ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’, p. 196.

<sup>441</sup> Hutchings, K. ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’, p. 196.

<sup>442</sup> Hutchings, K. ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’, p. 197.

successive stages of development of socio-cultural formations'.<sup>443</sup> As seen in the previous chapter, Habermas's answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation, through which he attempts to capture the structure of human historical development, relies on an analysis of the developmental logic of social evolution in the form of a sequence of stages of development of moral-practical knowledge at the level of individual world-views and consciousness structures and their embodiment in social institutions as different principles of social organisation through which societies adapt to historically posed developmental problems.

However, Honneth and Joas argue that 'a theory of social evolution that makes use of this pattern of explanation has completely detached itself from the real historical process which it is supposed to help structure'.<sup>444</sup> It does so to the extent that it must 'abstract' from the events and experiences of social groups in order to 'penetrate historical happenings' and get at the 'cognitive infrastructure' of historical development.<sup>445</sup> Habermas's analysis of the long-term process of human development thus becomes oriented to 'finding historical evidence' that substantiates the hypothesis of the 'logical' framework of social evolution.<sup>446</sup> A consequence of this approach is that the researcher 'loses sight of historically innovative action that expresses itself in social movements without responding directly or intentionally to a [developmental] problem threatening society'.<sup>447</sup> Hence, the 'actual history' of human societies and social movements becomes 'insignificant' when compared with the 'logical sequence' of the stages of social evolution.<sup>448</sup> Honneth and Joas thus accuse Habermas's theory of social evolution of having become 'so remote' from 'real historical happenings' that it can hardly be 'translated back' into an analysis of the actual historical dynamics and social processes shaping human development.<sup>449</sup> It is incapable of 'linking back' to the unique experiential situations of human beings with 'the purpose of supplying practical orientation for acting subjects'.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 160.

<sup>444</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 160.

<sup>445</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 164.

<sup>446</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 164.

<sup>447</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 165.

<sup>448</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 166.

<sup>449</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 166.

<sup>450</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 166.



Hutchings, Honneth and Joas's critiques highlight how Habermas's theory of social evolution locks him in a linear and teleological model of the species' history through the lenses of which he addresses the empirical process of human historical development. From the point of view of our engagement with the problem of orientation, this means that despite Habermas' expressed concern with the preservation of human difference the fact remains that his analysis is oriented by a stages-like conception of moral and social evolution that inherently characterises as 'backward' or 'failed' those forms of human self-expression and paths of human development that do not follow his orientating scheme. Consequently, Habermas's work reveals a more involved perspective than that to which he aspires; a perspective which remains bound to the historical and normative horizon of Western modernity. When regarded as an answer to the problem of orientation, Habermas's approach can thus appear to resonate with people belonging to the political communities who have undergone the developmental process that serves as Habermas' reference point, but it cannot serve an orientating function for other sections of humanity or for people striving to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective. In fact, it can actually be perceived as not only privileging a particularistic and ethnocentric point of view but also legitimizing practices of domination and exclusion in the name of cosmopolitanism and the self-determination of the species. In this manner, Habermas is unable to reach a more adequate involvement-detachment balance in his work, on the basis of which he attains a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition which is protective of difference and that provides a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation which guards against a reproduction of modernist grand narratives.

In this context, it can still be argued that Habermas's envisioned actualisation of the principles of discourse ethics at the level of world politics through the institutionalisation of deliberative processes of consensualization of cosmopolitan law which ultimately encompass the whole species would ameliorate the more involved perspective that is advanced by his work by enabling the creation of dialogic communities oriented not only to identify what is universally shared between human beings but also to the manifestation and preservation of difference. However, the incapacity of his theory of social evolution to reconnect back to historical events means that Habermas remains unable to provide an orientating framework regarding the empirical potential for the actual setting up of these deliberative processes. Missing such a sociologically-oriented analysis Habermas is left with

an abstract model of the ideal path of human development which only provides a selective analysis of history, orientated towards the corroboration of its own theoretical expectations. Hence, even though against his stated purpose, the self-legitimation of Habermas's critical theory comes to rely on the reproduction of the type of Kantian philosophical history which he seeks to avoid.

Our analysis of Habermas's work reveals how he is ultimately unable to carry out a reconstruction of Marx's critical approach that constitutes a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation. On the one hand, while Habermas shows a greater awareness of the role of the triad of controls in human development, he does not use it to further develop Marx's non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation and rather returns to a Kantian transcendental approach. On the other hand, he loses sight of the immanent potential of Marx's materialist and emergentist approach for a multi-linear and open-ended model of the species' history and instead adopts a linear and teleological theory of social evolution that recovers Kant's more idealist approach. As such, despite Habermas's recovery of Kantian themes that were lost in Marx, he also reproduces Kant's shortcomings in a manner that ultimately undermines his capacity to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition.

This conclusion leads us to argue that, with Habermas, critical theory comes at something of an impasse regarding its capacity to answer the problem of orientation. In fact, our analysis in this and the preceding chapters might lead us to ask if such an answer is even possible and a more adequate grand narrative can be developed that better attunes people to the challenges of their global interconnectedness, or if any attempt in this direction is condemned to reproduce modernist myths and totalising projects. However, we can also argue our analysis has highlighted several aspects of the works of Kant, Marx and Habermas that might point us in the direction of how a more adequate means of orientation can be developed which attains a more cosmopolitan perspective that recognises and preserves human difference and is thus better protected against the reproduction of modernist grand narratives. In particular, we can argue that a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation would have to gather the following characteristics: 1) it would have to be based on a materialist and emergentist approach to human development which is capable 2) of providing a non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation and 3) an explanatory model of the history of the species which captures its

multi-linear and open-ended character. This could be achieved by 4) providing a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the triad of controls in the long-term process of human development through 5) an analysis of the interplay between social processes such as the development of the forces of production, social norms, state formation and world politics which 6) recognises the role of both inter-group competition and cooperation on the basis of deliberative processes of consensualization in the development of the human powers of self-determination.

The challenge still remains, however, of how these characteristics can be brought together in a single grand narrative concerning the long-term history of the development and globalisation of the human species. In the next chapters we try to answer this question. There, we take a detour away from critical theory to address Elias's process sociology from the perspective of our inquiry. In particular, we follow Elias's argument that the fund of knowledge which is available to human beings about the long-term process of human development is still insufficient to provide adequate guidance regarding how people might bring under greater control the social processes which shape their conditions of existence. This position leads Elias to develop a sociological approach to human development which, rather than seek for the structure of history on the basis of which he can provide orientation as to how people can make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing, is instead engaged in an attempt to capture the main features of the species' history and the way in which these are variously manifested in multiple developmental paths which are becoming increasingly intertwined at the global scale. Elias can thus be said to take a detour from the anticipatory dimension of orientation to rather focus on its explanatory dimension. Our analysis of Elias's work in the next chapter leads us to argue that his process sociology points us in the direction of how a more adequate explanatory framework can be developed which captures the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development and enables the attainment of a more detached perspective on the human condition.

However, we also argue that Elias's postponement of an engagement with the anticipatory dimension of orientation undermines process sociology's capacity to address the more pressing challenges arising from human global interdependence. As such, in the last chapter of this study we advance our final argument that a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation depends on the future production of a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory which is capable of developing a more cosmopolitan

orientating framework on the basis of which people might better understand the long-term development of the global networks of interdependent humanity and the immanent potential that has been historically gathered for their conscious regulation.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have addressed Habermas's writings on world politics in order to highlight how these update Kant's proposal for a League of Nations in a manner that reveals the fundamental role that the political constitution of world society and the extension of processes of deliberative consensualization beyond the state level might have for the further expansion of human self-determination. However, we have also discussed how Habermas's reliance on a theory of social evolution which establishes a theoretical distinction between the logic and the dynamics of history reveals several shortcomings which are instructive regarding what might be required from a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation. At the end of the chapter we have advanced several criteria which arise from our analysis of Kant, Marx and Habermas's works and through which a more cosmopolitan means of orientation might be developed which better guards against the reproduction of modernist myths. In the next chapter, we turn to a discussion of Elias's process sociology which, we argue, points the way as to how this orientating framework might be developed.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Norbert Elias**

#### **A detour via detachment**

The previous four chapters analysed the ways in which Kant, Marx and Habermas's works can be read as addressing the problem of orientation. Each author can be said to strive for the production of a grand narrative which exhibits an involvement–detachment balance that is able to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition while recognising its own placement in the overall flow of human history and providing orientation regarding the immanent historical potential for a further expansion of human beings' capacity to collectively bring the processes shaping their lives under greater conscious control. Furthermore, as our analysis has shown, the search for this involvement–detachment balance is also expressed in the manner in which the critical authors have developed their conceptions of what a cosmopolitan perspective entails. Hence, we moved from Kant and Marx's conceptions of cosmopolitanism which place greater emphasis on the attainment of a universally shared perspective on the human condition, to consider Habermas's more nuanced conception of cosmopolitanism which entails the attempt at finding a balance between a more universal perspective on the long-term development of the shared conditions of global existence of humankind and the recognition and respect for the diversity of forms of human self-expression. As such, the critical theoretical engagements with the problem of orientation analysed so far can also be read as expressive of a collective learning process in attaining a more adequate involvement–detachment balance in their respective conceptions of cosmopolitanism, characterised by the development of a growing awareness about the need to avoid the reproduction of modernist forms of theorising that hide more parochial points of view in a manner that supports practices of exclusion of difference and the legitimation of forms of domination between different parts of humankind.

However, our analysis of the critical authors has also shown how they have all been unable to attain this balance in their respective perspectives, as again and again their work ends up reproducing, in one way or another, these modernist myths. Hence, both Kant and

Habermas's transcendental approach to the problem of orientation leads them to develop a theory of history which is uncoupled from the actual course of human events and rather serves as a linear and teleological model which interprets the history of the species *as if* it were progressing towards the actualization of their transcendental ideals. On the other hand, although Marx's materialist and emergentist approach opens the way for a multi-linear and open-ended conception of the species' history, his over-emphasis on control over nature and on relations of production undermines this potential as well as the adequacy of his non-transcendental assessment of the historical conditions of human freedom.

Nonetheless, despite the critical authors not presenting us with a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation, their works are also instructive as to how this answer might come to be found in the future. In particular, they have highlighted the fundamental role that grand narratives necessarily play in addressing the problem of orientation, as well as the costs of producing theoretical frameworks that either uncouple themselves from the actual course of human history or which are reductionist in their attempt to find a single factor shaping the whole history of the species. In this context, and continuing our image of an inter-generational dialogue between different authors wrestling with the problem of orientation, it can be noted that an attempt to provide a more adequate answer to this problem is not limited to critical theory.

As we argued in the first chapter of this study, Elias's process sociology can also be read as being engaged in a similar endeavour to that of the critical authors, even though his approach contrasts with theirs in some important aspects. In particular, we can argue that Elias specifically addresses the explanatory dimension of orientation and has little to say about the anticipatory dimension which frequently assumes a central place in critical theorising. Elias's argument in this context is that the fund of knowledge about the history of the species is still insufficient to allow a more adequate answer regarding how human beings might come to make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing; consequently, inquiries regarding the anticipatory dimension of orientation must be postponed until more reliable knowledge has been gathered which in the future might help people better understand what global arrangements are required to more consciously control their conditions of existence without producing new forms of exclusion and domination between them.

In this chapter, we argue that Elias's process sociology can constitute the basis for the development of a more adequate orientating grand narrative which is able to achieve a more cosmopolitan perspective that recognises and preserves the plurality of the human condition. In particular, Elias advances what can be considered as a materialist and emergentist approach to human development which actualises a multi-linear and open-ended model of the species' history that is based on a comprehensive understanding of the role of the triad of controls in its context and how it is manifested through social processes such as the development of individual personality structures, state formation and inter-state conflict. Elias's writings capture these social processes through concepts such as 'symbol emancipation'; 'civilising processes'; 'involvement–detachment balance'; 'double-bind processes'; 'monopoly mechanism' or 'functional democratisation' which are intended to embody the predominant features of human development and how these are manifested in different ways in the various developmental paths that different human groups have undertaken throughout history and which are becoming increasingly intertwined at the global scale. In this manner, Elias's work avoids more reductionist, linear and teleological models of the species' history focused on understanding its structure and its logical or ideal path. Our analysis of Elias's process sociology thus leads us to argue that he seeks to provide a new theoretical language on the basis of which a more comprehensive understanding of the human condition can be attained that better avoids a reproduction of the problems of modernist grand narratives and promotes more detached and cosmopolitan self-images at the level of peoples' perspectives which might underline the development of modes of orientation that are better attuned to the conditions of global interdependence of the species.<sup>451</sup> To the extent that Elias is successful in this endeavour, we can argue that his work proves indispensable for the development of a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation and as such, can be considered a fundamental alternative to Habermas's reconstruction of Marx's critical approach which, at least to a certain extent, better achieves what Habermas set out to do.

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<sup>451</sup> Elias, N. *What is Sociology?* [Collected Works, vol. 5] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2012). Working in the same process sociological tradition, Richard Kilminster notes that at no point in his work does Elias offer a concrete definition of his notion of 'means of orientation'. However, from his various treatments of the topic, it is possible to conclude that, in Elias's assessment, these refer to 'the symbolic reference points (which can include ideologies and targets for blaming as well as more realistic cognitive resources) which people draw upon in order to navigate themselves successfully in the complex and shifting inter-group relations of society'. See: Kilminster, R. in Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, [Collected Works, vol. 13] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2011), p. 120, footnote 8.

However, we also argue that Elias's overall tendency to postpone an engagement with the anticipatory dimension of orientation also means that process sociology cannot be understood as a substitute to critical theory. His refusal to advance more concrete answers regarding how human beings might bring under greater control pressing developmental problems posed by the unplanned social processes arising from human global interdependence and that threaten the historical maintenance of the conditions of sustainability of the planet's biosphere or of complex human societies might appear over-cautious, even in light of his argument regarding the lack of a sufficient knowledge fund about human development. As such, in the next chapter we advance the argument that a more adequate answer to both dimensions of the problem of orientation requires a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory. One which is capable of achieving a more adequate involvement–detachment balance to the extent that it is based on an orientating framework which, simultaneously, provides a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition that captures the multi-linear and open-ended character of the species' history, while providing an historically-embedded and processual assessment of the immanent potential gathered at different moments in history for an expansion of human beings' capacity to more consciously regulate the global networks of human interdependence. Given the validity of Elias's argument regarding the availability of reliable knowledge about human development, this synthesis is necessarily a work in progress that requires a constant interplay between the more detached analysis of different society-specific developmental paths and their increased global interweaving and the more involved assessment of its implications in terms of the potential for human beings' conscious control over their conditions of existence. As such, and given that the breath of such a task necessarily overcomes the time and length limitations of this study, the next chapter, rather than provide a final answer regarding how this synthesis might be achieved, limits itself to an analysis of Elias's work that highlights some critical themes that can be found in its context, in an attempt to create theoretical bridges with critical theory on the basis of which this synthesis might be produced in future research projects.

In this chapter we focus on an exposition of those elements of Elias's work which are most relevant for our present inquiry. Our discussion is divided into two main sections. First, we address Elias's critique of Marx's work in the context of which we analyse his argument regarding the need for a detour via detachment oriented to increase the fund of reliable



knowledge about human development by focusing on the empirical and sociological analysis of human history and its main developmental patterns. Second, we address how this explanatory detour leads Elias to produce an analysis of the role of the triad of controls in the species' history that captures the interweaving between various social processes at the level of human beings' relations with internal human nature, with external non-human nature and with the networks of human interdependence in a manner that avoids the reproduction of linear and teleological grand narratives. The analysis of the triad of controls in this chapter is predominantly focused on intra-societal relations, while the first section of the next chapter addresses how Elias's process sociology orientates his study of world politics and the global interweaving of the species.

### **1. Marx and the involvement–detachment balance**

In this section we address Elias's critique of Marx's work in order to discuss his proposed detour via detachment as a fundamental step in the production of a more adequate means of orientation. Elias's position is that Marx's writings are particularly expressive of the problems associated with critical theory and its premature attempt to ascertain how human beings can lead a more self-determined existence, which is carried out on the basis of a still insufficient fund of knowledge about the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping the species' history. In Elias's view, this undermines the critical authors' capacity to achieve a more detached perspective on the human condition and locks them in more involved points of view that might actually reinforce the unplanned and conflictual character of social processes rather than contribute for their conscious regulation.

Elias's engagement with Marx can be seen throughout his writings; however, he presents his most comprehensive analysis in the essay '*Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist*'.<sup>452</sup> There, Elias develops a critique of Marx's work on the basis of what he sees as the highly ambiguous character of Marx's engagement with the study of human historical development. According to Elias, on the one hand, Marx's analysis of human development and class relations is highly 'processual' and reveals fundamental insights on the ever changing character of human beings and their mutual relations of power, conflict,

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<sup>452</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist' in *What is Sociology?*, pp. 173-200.

cooperation and interdependence throughout history.<sup>453</sup> But, on the other hand, Marx also constantly 'freezes' his conception of the ever changing character of class relations, to present the particular structure of class relations of his own time as the expression of a universal stage of human development, leading to a predetermined and necessary future outcome.<sup>454</sup> In Elias's view, the ambiguous character of Marx's approach can be explained by the fact that Marx, for 'political reasons' wishes to 'present the working class at the stage of development of his own time in absolute terms as the eternal, unchanging working class – until all classes disappear'.<sup>455</sup>

According to Elias, Marx's ambiguity is due to his high level of emotional attachment to nineteenth century class struggles which leads him to constantly conflate his more detached analysis as a sociologist with his more involved role as a political ideologist of the working class. As such, while 'Marx the sociologist sees the developmental character of class structures clearly enough (...) as a political ideologist, he constantly covers up what he perceives as a scientist'.<sup>456</sup> Presenting the nineteenth century European, and mainly English, class relations as a universal stage, to which the long-term process of human development inevitably leads to in accordance with the laws of economic development, fulfils an important role in the ideological and political struggles between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in which Marx was involved. However, it also leads Marx to frequently lose sight of the analytical potential inherent in his materialist and emergentist approach for a more adequate understanding of the actual dynamics shaping his own historical period, its future trends of development, and the overall history of the species. In particular, Marx's politically-motivated projection of nineteenth century class relations as a universal stage in human development leads him to a more involved perspective, which is locked in the social and temporal horizon of Western modernity and which makes Marx constantly lose sight of the open-ended and multi-linear character of human development as well as fail to recognise how ongoing changes in the balance of power between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – as a result of the class struggles in which he himself is engaged – open up the

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<sup>453</sup> As Linklater observes, Elias considers Marx's emphasis on the long-term trajectories of the species and on the main dynamics and social processes that shape human development one of those 'indispensable' hypotheses that cannot be 'bypassed' and that, in some respects, is yet to be 'equalled' as a theory of society. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 160.

<sup>454</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 179.

<sup>455</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 181.

<sup>456</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 182.

possibility for different social futures rather than revolution and the abolition of all classes.<sup>457</sup>

Consequently, according to Elias, when addressing Marx's work, we must strive to do so in a manner that permits to identify the 'fundamental theoretical insights' that Marx contributes to the development of a more adequate theoretical framework regarding the human condition and the long-term process of development of the species while, at the same time, 'distancing' ourselves from the 'ideological trench warfare' that leads Marx to constantly pose the Western pattern of class relations as universal.<sup>458</sup> Elias's critique of Marx thus captures the main challenges inherent in the problem of orientation and the main shortcomings with how it is addressed in the context of Marx's work. It notes how Marx strives to achieve a more detached perspective through a focus on the role played in the history of the species by human control over non-human nature and on the relations of production that arise in its context. However, Elias also argues that Marx is ultimately unable to sustain this degree of detachment. His commitment to class politics and to the expansion of the proletarians' capacity to control their conditions of existence – as the historical class representative of globalised humanity – leads Marx to a more involved perspective, based on a linear theory of history, which frames the long-term process of human development in the particular concerns and point of view of his own time period.

According to Elias, this involvement makes Marx lose sight of the role of other social processes beyond the relations of production and the control of nature in the overall history of the species.<sup>459</sup> In particular, Elias argues that it leads Marx's critical approach to be structured around a thesis which considers that 'social groups to which greater power changes accrue in relation to other groups exploit this relative superiority of power optimally, without any other idea than their own advantage'.<sup>460</sup> These groups can only be 'hindered' in their 'unrestricted exploitation' of their advantages if the development of the social 'balance of power' permits other groups to have greater power chances, so that they

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<sup>457</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 197.

<sup>458</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 185.

<sup>459</sup> This argument is turned by some process sociologists, such as Kilminster, into a critique of Marx's work that refuses a greater engagement between process sociological and critical theoretical approaches to human development, in contrast with the position advanced in this study. See: Kilminster, R. 'The dawn of detachment: Norbert Elias and sociology's two tracks', *History of the Human Sciences*, 27: 96 (2014) p. 96-115 or Kilminster, R. 'Critique and overcritique in sociology', *Human Figurations: Long-term perspectives on the human condition*, 2: 2 (2013).

<sup>460</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 186.

can 'disempower' the former.<sup>461</sup> In Elias's view, this conception of power relations shapes Marx's analysis of capitalism, in which he sees the bourgeois class carrying out the 'unrestricted exploitation' of the proletariat as a result of the power advantages that it possesses over the latter given its position in the network of human interdependencies created by capitalist relations of production. Furthermore, this same conception leads Marx to the conclusion that the only way to 'disempower' the bourgeois class is through the usage of the power chances that accrue the proletariat, as a result of its numerical superiority, in a 'physical struggle' against the bourgeoisie as previously the 'bourgeois-led masses' had done in their struggle against princely and aristocratic holders of power.<sup>462</sup> So, Elias considers that, to Marx, revolution is the 'means of power of the socially weaker in the struggle against economic violence', which is 'the means of power of the socially stronger groups in industrial societies'.<sup>463</sup>

However, according to Elias, Marx's observation that the monopolisation of economic means of power represents the 'primary source of social power' is expressive of his involved perspective on human development. It is the analysis of someone whose analytical horizon is shaped predominantly by the historical period and place in which he is writing, when the monopolisation of physical violence by the state has been so consolidated in Western European societies that it is possible to identify economic violence as a distinguishable type from physical violence.<sup>464</sup> At that particular historical juncture, Elias observes, the main source of uncontrolled dynamics affecting human development appears no longer to be physical violence between people but instead economic violence, and the main question facing human beings living in Western European societies – especially those who possess less power-chances – becomes how greater collective and conscious control can be exercised over the monopolies of economic power that are formed by the free competition of capitalist enterprises in the global market.

In Elias's view, Marx's involved perspective of the ideological and political struggles of the nineteenth century between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is expressed in his projection of the particular problems connected with economic violence in that period to his analysis of the whole course of human development. As such, at the centre of his work

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<sup>461</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 186.

<sup>462</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 186.

<sup>463</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 186.

<sup>464</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 186.

appear the problems connected with the development of economic forms of violence, the formation of economic monopolies of power, and the question of how greater control can be exercised over the unplanned dynamics arising from economic competition.<sup>465</sup> Consequently, Elias argues that even though Marx advocates the use of physical violence as a tool of social transformation, his analysis does not extend to a 'more exact exploration of the monopolisation of physical force as one of the social sources of power potentials'.<sup>466</sup> Otherwise, Marx could not have failed to recognise that the distinction between these two forms of violence is a fairly recent historical development and that, for example, 'in the struggles of feudal warrior houses, (...) [what] we distinguish as physical or military force and economic force acted together more or less as one'.<sup>467</sup>

Marx's more involved approach thus leads to a lack of engagement with the role of the monopolisation of physical violence in the process of human development. In particular, it makes him pay less attention to the extent to which the capitalist mode of production and its specific class structure depend on the internal pacification of society guaranteed by the state and its regulation of economic activity and of competition between classes through the enactment of social norms backed by a monopoly over the means of violence. As such, Marx's conception of power struggles between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat always assumes that these are 'governed solely by the exploitation of the existing power differentials and unregulated by any norms agreed to and recognised by both sides'.<sup>468</sup> In this manner, Elias's critique of Marx shares Habermas's argument regarding how Marx's emphasis on production needs to be complemented by a greater consideration of the role of social norms and state formation in the process of human development. However, as the previous chapter has shown, Habermas's attempted solution implies a substitution of Marx's one-sided focus by a theory of social evolution which is incapable of reconnecting back to historical events and the way in which these are shaped by particular relations of power and competition embedded in shifting networks of mutual interdependence between people. Consequently, Habermas's critical approach is no less one-sided than Marx's, placing the embodiment of moral-practical knowledge in social institutions at the centre of its analysis and downplaying the historical development of power dynamics between human

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<sup>465</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 188.

<sup>466</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 188.

<sup>467</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 339.

<sup>468</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 188.

groups. In this context, Elias's makes an observation about contemporary social theory which can also be applied to Habermas's reconstruction of Marx's critical approach. According to Elias, 'if Marx placed at the centre of his model of society the unregulated power struggles of groups unchecked by any norms', other social theories – within which Habermas's theory of social evolution can be included – 'usually place the integrating norms themselves at the centre of their image of society (...) [leading] the problem of power differentials, and the nature of social power in general, to play at best a marginal role'.<sup>469</sup>

Moreover, Elias observes that while the 'relatively high' degree of regulation of power struggles within modern Western welfare states might lead theories of human development to focus on this regulation and on the social norms that ensure it, it cannot be overlooked that 'what is regulated by social norms is the resolution of tensions, conflicts and trials of strength'.<sup>470</sup> As such, in order to understand the development of the human powers of control over the dynamics of human relations through collective social norms it is essential to remain aware that people 'do not simply subject themselves to certain norms automatically'.<sup>471</sup> Rather, social norms develop according to changes in the structure of interdependence between human groups, in particular, changes in the balance of their respective power differentials.<sup>472</sup> Hence, to any theory of human development, such as Habermas's, which fails to account for this connection between social norms and power relations, 'the problem of the conditions under which previously unregulated regions of social life, structured solely by power differentials, become accessible to human control, to regulation by integrating norms, remains beyond their horizon'.<sup>473</sup> Following Elias, it can be argued that these theories ultimately express the same shortcomings as Marx's critical approach insofar as they advance a more involved perspective according to which the centrality that social norms assume in the context of Western societies is taken as a universal feature of the history of the species.

Elias's critique of Marx's work thus reflects his wider considerations about the importance of the involvement–detachment balance in social scientific research. From the perspective of our inquiry, it points to how social scientists' analyses can be undermined in

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<sup>469</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 188.

<sup>470</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 189.

<sup>471</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 190.

<sup>472</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 190.

<sup>473</sup> Elias, N. 'Karl Marx as sociologist and political ideologist', p. 190.

their adequacy and usefulness as a means of orientation by more involved perspectives which might block their capacity to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping human development.<sup>474</sup> In particular, Elias considers that the lack of a sufficiently reliable fund of knowledge about social processes means that premature assessments regarding how human beings might exercise a greater degree of conscious and collective control over their conditions of existence frequently result in answers that express more involved and parochial points of views and which portray them as representative of a truly cosmopolitan perspective, as is exemplified with particular clarity by Marx's work.<sup>475</sup> In this context, Elias's definition of the work of social scientists as 'hunters of myths' is instructive; it points to the need for more detached analyses of the human condition and of the long-term history of the species and its global interweaving, which are able to step back from more involved points of view and, in the process, avoid the reproduction of modernist myths and all the shortcomings which are associated with them.<sup>476</sup> As such, Elias's position can be read as implying that prior to an assessment of how to regulate the unplanned processes of human global interdependence 'in such a way as to make them less meaningless and less wasteful of lives and resources (...) the central tasks of sociological teaching and research [lies] in acquiring a general understanding of these forces and in an increase in more reliable knowledge about them'.<sup>477</sup> An initial focus is required on the development of a more comprehensive and detached means of orientation regarding the long-term process of human development, which postpones an assessment of what this analysis might mean, from a more involved perspective, for the prospects of extending human conscious control over social processes at particular historical junctures. Elias's proposal for a more adequate involvement–detachment balance thus requires an initial 'detour via detachment' which pushes to the side-lines of social inquiry concerns regarding its normative implications. From the perspective of our conceptual framework, Elias thus clearly argues for the need to focus

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<sup>474</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 71.

<sup>475</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 116.

<sup>476</sup> Elias, N. *What is Sociology?*, p. 48.

<sup>477</sup> Elias, N. *What is Sociology?*, p. 11.

predominantly on the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation to the detriment of an engagement with its anticipatory dimension.<sup>478</sup>

However, Elias also notes that it is frequently difficult for human beings to tilt the balance towards detachment in their way of perceiving the world; a difficulty which he partly explains by the dynamics of 'double-bind processes'.<sup>479</sup> With this concept, Elias tries to capture the social processes according to which the threats and problems posed by uncontrolled forces – either natural or social – produce tensions and fears amongst human beings which are usually accompanied by highly involved conceptions of themselves, their particular predicaments and the world in general. According to Elias, the higher the uncontrolled dangers to which people are exposed, the more involved, ego-centric and emotionally charged tend to be their perspectives and thus the more difficult it is for them to develop a more detached attitude towards their conditions of existence, which permits the production of more reliable knowledge about both the human and the non-human parts of the universe, on the basis of which they might acquire a better chance to exercise control over these threats. As Elias observes, and as we will analyse in greater detail in the next section, the double-bind has been partially broken in some sections of humanity vis-à-vis non-human nature.<sup>480</sup> A historically hard-won detour via detachment in people's engagements with nature has enabled some sections of humanity to self-control their emotionally charged involvements when dealing with natural phenomena, and thus develop a more detached and less ego-centric perspective on the non-human part of the universe which underlined the development of a more reliable fund of knowledge about natural processes. This detour has been followed by a secondary re-involvement which, on the basis

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<sup>478</sup> As Linklater argues, in Elias's view, people's hopes for the species cannot compromise the detached search for 'reality-congruent' knowledge. His fear that 'partisan inquiry' might entail 'false beliefs' about human potentials or 'simplistic accounts' of the extent to which human beings can control their conditions of existence, leads Elias to an 'uncompromising' commitment for 'non-partisan sociological inquiry' which he hopes might one day rival the greater detachment of natural-scientific inquiry. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm*, p. 163. In this context, Dennis Smith observes that Elias conceives of process sociology as a 'science for survival' which provides more reliable knowledge about human development that might help people in the future understand, and partially control, the processes shaping their lives in a manner that at least avoids some of their more harmful effects. However, as Robert van Krieken notes, Elias constantly avoids making more comprehensive statements about the 'utopian' element of his thinking and how he conceives that future human world society might actually exercise a greater degree of control over social processes. See: Smith, D. *Norbert Elias and Modern Social Theory* (London, Sage, 2001), p. 21 and van Krieken, R. *Norbert Elias* (London, Routledge, 1998), p. 147. See also: Saramago, A. 'Problems of Orientation and Control: Marx, Elias and the Involvement-Detachment Balance in Figurational Sociology', *Human Figurations: Long-term perspectives on human development*, 4:2 (2015).

<sup>479</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 114.

<sup>480</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 20.



of this knowledge, has enabled a more adequate answer to the question of how people might achieve a greater degree of conscious and collective control over non-human external nature.<sup>481</sup> The increase in the people's capacity to control nature has thus permitted a reduction of the threat posed by natural forces and, consequently, of the tensions and fears caused by them, in a process that further reinforced the development of a more detached attitude towards natural phenomena.<sup>482</sup>

However, in a manner similar to Marx's observations on the connection between the development of human control over nature and the historical development of social processes, Elias also argues that this 'same process which has made people less dependent on nature has made them more dependent of each other'.<sup>483</sup> It has brought about new forms of interdependence between human beings from which emerge unplanned social processes that pose new sources of insecurity and threat. As such, the double-bind is still prevalent at the level of the increasingly global social bonds of humanity, in the context of which people, 'vulnerable and insecure, (...) cannot stand back and look at the course of events calmly like more detached observers'.<sup>484</sup> Consequently, in Elias's view, knowledge about human social existence, and the general attitude towards its study, is still characterized by a balance predominantly shaped by more involved perspectives in comparison with knowledge about non-human nature.

In the next section, we address how Elias seeks to change this balance by carrying out a detour via detachment which focuses his analysis of human development on the explanatory dimension of orientation and leads him to produce a grand narrative that provides a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of controls in the species' history in a manner that captures its predominant dynamics and social processes and how these can assume multiple paths and forms of expression. This analysis leads us to argue that Elias's materialist and emergentist approach to the empirical study of human development can be understood as recovering the potential found in Marx's work for an explanatory, multi-linear and open-ended model of human history and thus opens the way for a more detached and cosmopolitan means of orientation regarding the conditions of existence of globalised humanity and the long-term

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<sup>481</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 72.

<sup>482</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 71.

<sup>483</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 77.

<sup>484</sup> Elias, N., *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 78.

process of global interweaving of the species, while recognising the fundamental condition of human plurality and better guarding against the reproduction of modernist myths.

## **2. The triad of controls in human development**

In this section we discuss how the notion of the triad of controls frames Elias's process sociology in a manner that constitutes the basis for a more adequate answer to the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation. Our analysis is divided into three subsections. First, we consider Elias's notion of 'symbolic emancipation' as a turning point in the evolutionary process on Earth and in the development of the human powers of control over non-human external nature. Furthermore, we also observe how Elias's work in this context highlights the fundamental difference between his developmental approach to the study of human historical development and Habermas's evolutionary approach. Second, we move to an analysis of Elias's conception of civilisation and how it is linked with the development of people's self-control over their more animalic drives and impulses. And third, we address Elias's observations on human control over social processes in connection with his notion of civilisation, where we introduce Elias's concepts of the 'monopoly mechanism' and 'functional democratisation'.

### **2.1. Symbol emancipation and control over nature**

As with the critical theorists, Elias is fundamentally concerned with the production of a grand narrative on human development which, amongst other things, is able to provide a better notion of the distinguishing features of human beings vis-à-vis other animals. Like Kant, Marx or Habermas, he considers that an awareness of such distinctions is fundamental for a better understanding of the human condition, of how the globalisation of the species has occurred, and of which might be the potential future paths of human development.

In the book *'The Symbol Theory'*, Elias addresses this topic through the lenses of an analysis of the role of symbolic communication in the evolutionary process on Earth. According to Elias, one of the most striking characteristics of humankind is its high level of changeability without incurring biological evolution, a characteristic which he attributes to

the fact that, unlike other animals – whose forms of behaviour are predominantly ‘genetically determined’ – ‘learned variations’ have gained the upper hand in human beings.<sup>485</sup> While other animals predominantly orientate themselves in the world in accordance with a genetically inherited instinctual and behavioural pattern which is ‘species-specific’, i.e. common to all members of the same genetic species, humans have developed a high degree of behavioural malleability which permits their forms of communication, their societies and their individual personality structures to undergo a high range of changes within the framework of a single biological species.<sup>486</sup> It is important to highlight that, by identifying such distinctions between humans and other animals Elias is not establishing a split between humanity and nature. On the contrary, he can be said to share Marx’s materialist and emergentist perspective which understands the development of the distinguishing human characteristics within the framework of the evolutionary process on Earth and the biological heritage of humankind. In Elias’s view, there are no splits between humans and other species; human beings ‘emerge’ from their animal ancestors in the course of a continuous process of evolution.<sup>487</sup> Even though they are ‘in certain respects unique and unlike any other animal on Earth (...) their unique properties emerge from, and are fully integrated into, their animal heritage’.<sup>488</sup>

As such, Elias does not conceive of a fundamental division between animals whose behaviour is genetically determined, and humans in which it is malleable through learning.<sup>489</sup> Instead, – and in keeping with his general suspicion of dualisms and dichotomous oppositions – he identifies the capacity for learning itself as a product of biological factors, and prefers to refer to a balance between genetically determined and learning oriented forms of behaviour, which might tilt more or less to one side or the other.<sup>490</sup> Hence, one can see a tilting of the balance throughout the long-term process of

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<sup>485</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 45.

<sup>486</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 45.

<sup>487</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 47.

<sup>488</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 47.

<sup>489</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 40.

<sup>490</sup> Elias’s work is characterized by a prevailing criticism of attempts to understand the dynamics and social processes shaping human development through dualistic categories that oppose, for example, individual and society, agency and structure, nature and humanity or body and mind. Instead, he argues that concepts at a higher level of synthesis are required, which capture the processual character of human development and avoid posing false oppositions which do not find expression in the actual course of the history of the species. Particularly expressive of this position is his concept of ‘figuration’ which he uses to describe ‘particular groupings of interdependent human beings’. Elias uses the metaphor of a dance to explain his notion of

evolution on the planet, with mammals – and, within them, apes in particular – revealing a greater capacity for learned behaviour than, for example, insects.<sup>491</sup> Humans represent the latest phase in this long-term process of evolution in which the balance predominantly tilts towards learning oriented behaviour. While in ape societies, forms of behaviour and communication, despite local variations acquired through learning within particular groups, are still predominantly species-specific, in the case of human beings ‘society-specific’ forms of behaviour have acquired predominance.<sup>492</sup> That is not to say, however, that genetically determined behavioural patterns have disappeared from the human repertoire, as can be seen by the examples of the smile, cries of pain, or fight or flee mechanisms; but these play an auxiliary role in human communication and behaviour and, in some cases such as smiling, have actually come to be under greater conscious control on the part of human individuals.<sup>493</sup>

As mentioned above, the predominance of learning in human behavioural orientation permits a high degree of variation within the context of a single biological

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figuration, by noting that, in a dance, each dancer is influence by the other dancers’ movements in a manner that none of them controls and which makes the dance assume a particular movement which is ‘relatively independent’ of each individual. However, it cannot be said that the dance constitutes an autonomous substance or structure, separate from the individual dancers. See: Elias, N. *What is Sociology*, pp. 8ff. As van Krieken observes, to Elias, human figurations, be it dances or societies, cannot be conceived as a structure outside individuals, but must instead be conceived as patterns of interdependence between a plurality of human beings which, while relatively autonomous from each individual, cannot exist without them, and whose causal power arises from the interweaving of individual actions and relations of mutual interdependence. See: van Krieken, R. *Norbert Elias*, p. 55. See also: Smith, D. *Norbert Elias and Modern Sociology*, p. 169ff.

<sup>491</sup> In this context, Linklater notes that Elias criticizes the tendency to confuse the greater ‘plasticity’ of human instinctive behaviour with the implication that human beings possess ‘weak instincts’. There is no proof that human instincts are weaker than those of other animals, but they appear to be more ‘malleable’ and more ‘amenable to control’, a characteristic which has emerged out of the process of evolution itself. As such, with reference to Habermasian concepts, Linklater argues that, to Elias, cultural development has replaced biological evolution as the main ‘pacemaker’ of human development. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm*, p. 158.

<sup>492</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 45.

<sup>493</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 45. According to Kilminster, Elias’s symbol theory, by conceiving of human beings and their defining capacity for symbolic communication as an emergent process within the context of the wider process of evolution on the planet, successfully steers between two extreme positions which permeate research on the animalic dimension and heritage of humanity. On the one hand, it avoids the reductionist view of some ethologists and sociobiologists to whom humans are basically apes and, on the other hand, it refuses the philosophical-religious view which conceives of human beings as representing a complete break with natural evolution, endowed with unique characteristics variously describe as ‘spirit’, ‘soul’ or ‘consciousness’. See: Kilminster, R. *Norbert Elias: Post-philosophical sociology* (Oxon, Routledge, 2007), p. 136. Furthermore, and as we address in chapter seven, we can add that the parallels between Elias’s position in *Symbol Theory* and Marx’s materialist and emergentist approach to human development are evident to the extent that Elias, like Marx, avoids falling into either the extremes of mechanistic materialism or idealism, and advances what in chapter three we characterised as an ‘ecological orientation’ which avoids a dualism between that which is ‘natural’ and that which is ‘human’.

species. We can observe great changes in human societies – for example, from a feudal to a capitalist structure – within the time span of a few centuries or less. As Elias observes, ‘social growth and decay, a long line of integration from one level to another, from tribe to empire and from empire to feudal disintegration, can be observed within a time-span that is short in terms of biological evolution’.<sup>494</sup> As such, in order to differentiate human society-specific changes and biological species-specific characteristics, Elias draws a distinction between ‘developmental’ and ‘evolutionary’ processes. In his view, evolution expresses an ‘irreversible’ biological process of change, while development represents a ‘reversible’ one which takes place without biological changes.<sup>495</sup> To illustrate his meaning, he observes that ‘as products of evolution, mammals readjusting to life in the sea do not transform themselves into water-breathing fish’.<sup>496</sup> On the other hand, ‘states – and other representatives of a relatively late stage of social development which, for one reason or another, decline – can transform themselves into social units at an earlier stage of development’.<sup>497</sup> This does not mean that a declining state is going to transform into exactly the type of constituent units whose integration led to its formation in the first place, such as tribes. But it ‘reverts’ to an earlier phase of social development, for example, by fragmentation into smaller social units with their own monopolistic control over the means of violence and in violent competition with each other.<sup>498</sup>

The shift of the balance between learning oriented and genetically determined forms of behaviour has thus opened the way for the historical emergence – out of the evolutionary biological process which had hitherto shaped life on Earth – of a species capable of undergoing reversible developmental and social processes. It has equipped human beings with the biological capacity and need to learn from other humans society-specific forms of behavioural orientation and to undergo processes of development which are qualitatively different from evolutionary processes. In particular, Elias observes that biological features, such as the vocal apparatus and cortical brain dominance, have endowed humans with a species-specific capacity to carry out what he considers to be one

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<sup>494</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 47.

<sup>495</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 48.

<sup>496</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 48.

<sup>497</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 48.

<sup>498</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 48.

of the main turning points in the history of the species and of life on Earth; i.e. to initiate a developmental process to which he calls 'symbol emancipation'.<sup>499</sup>

With this concept, Elias refers to the fact that human communication and learning through the production and reception of sound-patterns is not purely genetically determined, as in the case of other animal species. Rather, human voice-sounds can be patterned in accordance with a learned and society-specific code which makes it possible for each member of that society to understand these sound-patterns as symbols for objects and phenomena in both the human and the non-human parts of the universe.<sup>500</sup> Human beings thus possess a capacity to produce symbolically-codified stocks of knowledge about their world and conditions of existence which function as means of behavioural orientation which can be passed on from generation to generation. The advantages in terms of orientation of human symbolic communication and learning become evident when compared with the largely unlearned and genetically determined forms of animal communication. While unlearned animal signs – whether voice-signals or body-movements – are significantly more rigid and tied to momentary situations, human symbols have a comparatively high capacity to be detached from space and time bound contexts.<sup>501</sup> This means that while animals are locked in behavioural patterns which might be adapted to specific situations and environments but cannot adapt to new contexts unless they undergo biological evolution, human symbolic communication enables human beings to develop learning processes about the world which can be symbolically-codified into an ever expanding fund of knowledge. This fund of knowledge permits them to constantly learn how to orientate themselves in relation to new and changing situations and, furthermore, it can be improved upon from generation to generation in order to become increasingly more reliable and adequate as a means of orientation that captures the processes constituting their ever-changing conditions of existence. As Elias notes, symbolically-mediated orientation through learning processes enables a degree of behavioural flexibility which is 'quite beyond the reach of other animals, whose genetic make-up may provide an excellent way of coping with a specific situation and yet blocks their ability to cope with the demands of their situation if

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<sup>499</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 71.

<sup>500</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 71.

<sup>501</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 71.

the task changes in a manner for which a species is not genetically equipped'.<sup>502</sup> Elias thus refers to human symbolic emancipation as 'liberation from the bondage of largely unlearned or innate signals'.<sup>503</sup> It unleashes a potentially unlimited developmental process of learning which enables humankind not only to acquire a dominant position vis-à-vis other species on Earth but to also become a major factor conditioning the future course of their process of evolution.<sup>504</sup> Similarly to Marx, Elias thus notes how the long-term process of human development has progressively led to the unplanned emergence of human beings unique species-capacity to learn how to exercise greater control over the non-human part of the universe and shape it to the fulfilment of their needs.

In this context, we can also discuss those which Elias understands as the main dynamics shaping the development of the human powers of control over nature. In the book *'Involvement and Detachment'* Elias introduces the already mentioned notion of the double-bind to refer to the circular movement that can be identified between the development of people's control over non-human nature, the development of their capacity to self-control their internal drives and impulses, and the greater detachment in their perspectives and symbolically-codified models of natural phenomena. It is Elias's argument that, when threatened by natural phenomena which they cannot control, human beings tend to be less able to exercise self-control over their internal drives and affects.<sup>505</sup> Under these conditions, human knowledge production about external nature also tends to be more involved and predominantly shaped by ego-centric concerns and by society and time bound perspectives. Specifically, Elias observes that when the involvement–detachment balance in people's personality structures is significantly tilted towards the

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<sup>502</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 72.

<sup>503</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 71.

<sup>504</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 111. As Stephen Quilley notes, the emergence of social processes based on language from the evolutionary process on Earth means that both the human pattern of life, and that of other species around it, became subject to the development of culture, a process that Quilley, with reference to Johan Goudsblom, characterises as the expansion of the 'anthroposphere' within the 'biosphere'. See: Quilley, S. 'Ecology, 'human nature' and civilising processes: biology and sociology in the work of Norbert Elias', *The Sociology of Norbert Elias*, edited by Steven Loyal and Stephen Quilley (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 44 and Quilley, S. 'Social Development as Trophic Expansion: Food Systems, Prosthetic Ecology and the Arrow of History', *Amsterdam Sociologisch Tijdschrift*, 31: 3 (2004) pp. 321-348. Goudsblom has been a central figure in the process sociological study of the connection between the development of the human capacity to control non-human nature – particularly focusing on the study of control over fire and other sources of energy – and the long-term process of development of the species and associated historical emergence of complex human societies. See: Goudsblom, J. *Fire and Civilisation* (London, Penguin, 1995); Goudsblom, J. and Vriers, B. *Mappae Mundi: Humans and their Habitats in a Long-Term Socio-Ecological Perspective, Myths, Maps and Models* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2002).

<sup>505</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 125.

former, the human production of symbolically-codified knowledge, on the basis of which people orientate themselves in relation to the natural world, exhibits a high level 'fantasy-content'.<sup>506</sup> It is focused on filling the gaps in human knowledge with forms of magical-mythical thinking which are more concerned with understanding the meaning of natural phenomena for human beings, rather than understanding their underlying processual dynamics in themselves.<sup>507</sup> As such, a highly involved perspective frequently entails an understanding of nature as a world inhabited by spirits whose actions are responsible for natural phenomena and are full of meaning and purpose to human beings. The essential aim of discovery under these conditions is the acquisition of knowledge about the hidden purpose and intentions behind events and their hidden meaning for oneself and one's community.<sup>508</sup> Knowledge of these hidden meanings is inscribed in the body of oral and written tales, proverbs and prescriptions of a society, which function as means of orientation to its members and which pass on from one generation to another frequently with shamans, priests or magicians acting as their keepers.<sup>509</sup>

To human beings locked in a double-bind process, whose perceptions of natural phenomena are highly involved, the capacity to perceive the world as the product of a series of intertwining, unplanned and blind processes which have no inherent meaning and are indifferent to human existence is largely inaccessible.<sup>510</sup> Not only are people unable to detach their perceptions from their ego-centric immediate concerns and the dangers posed by uncontrolled natural forces, but also a more detached perspective on the natural world does not fulfil their emotional need for meaning. It does not answer the basic questions framing their interactions with nature, which are focused not on the search for a causal understanding of natural phenomena, but rather on what their meaning is for particular individuals and communities.<sup>511</sup>

As Elias notes, the involvement–detachment balance in people's perspectives of non-human nature is fundamentally connected with the development of their powers of control over natural processes. Perceiving nature in a more involved and ego-centric manner which interprets natural phenomena in terms of intentional agencies that interact

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<sup>506</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 137.

<sup>507</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 130.

<sup>508</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 125.

<sup>509</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 128.

<sup>510</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 130.

<sup>511</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 132.



with human beings blocks peoples' capacity to achieve a more decentred perspective, on the basis of which they might analyse natural processes and develop symbolic models of these phenomena whose focus is not so much on capturing their meaning but rather in understanding what they are in themselves, how their development is structured, and how they are connected to each other.<sup>512</sup> As such, people's capacity to orientate vis-à-vis non-human nature in a manner that guarantees a more adequate intervention in natural phenomena and enables a greater degree of collective and conscious control over natural forces is lower under conditions of relatively high involvement than under conditions in which the balance between involvement and detachment, between fantasy-content and more decentred and reliable knowledge, has significantly tilted towards the latter.<sup>513</sup> People caught in double-bind processes thus find themselves locked in a circular movement in which the high level of danger posed by uncontrolled natural forces has its counterpart in high levels of involvement and fantasy-content in their perspectives of the world and in a lower capacity to exercise conscious control over the unplanned natural processes which threaten them.<sup>514</sup> People experience a high level of 'affect in knowledge about the dangers [which is] heavily charged with fantasy and leads to the constant reproduction of the high level of danger and therefore of modes of thought governed more by fantasy than reality'.<sup>515</sup>

On the other hand, and as we argued in the first section, Elias also observes that some sections of humanity have been able to carry out a historically hard-won detour via detachment which enabled them to partially break the double-bind in their relations with nature by producing symbolically-codified stocks of knowledge about natural phenomena in which the balance between fantasy-content and more decentred knowledge has shifted predominantly towards the latter. Oriented by less ego-centric explanatory models of the non-human part of the universe, people in these parts of the world have been able to more

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<sup>512</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 135.

<sup>513</sup> In van Krieken's assessment, Elias's conception of the relation between the involvement-detachment balance and human control over either natural or social processes expresses a parallel with the 'psychoanalytic view' of bringing to consciousness aspects of human life which were previously unconscious. Like in psychoanalysis, a more detached analysis of social and natural processes produces a greater awareness of their underlying and previously unconscious dynamics in a manner that enables human beings to more consciously intervene in them and shape their development in particular directions. See: Krieken, R. *Norbert Elias*, p. 162.

<sup>514</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 67.

<sup>515</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 107.

consciously intervene in natural processes and thus acquire a greater capacity to tame and redirect them towards human ends. A higher degree of control over natural processes means a reduction of their threats and dangers and a lowering of the tensions they cause in human beings which facilitates a further diminution of the role of people's internal emotions and affects in their perceptions of the world, and thus increases their capacity to achieve a more detached perspective.<sup>516</sup> The untying of the double-bind thus implies another circular movement, but now in the opposite direction, one to which Elias refers to as the 'principle of increasing facilitation'.<sup>517</sup>

Elias's observations on symbol emancipation and the development of the human powers of control over nature can thus be read as bringing together fundamental themes from Marx and Habermas's critical approaches. On the one hand, Elias advances a materialist and emergentist approach which places the historical process of human development in the context of the wider process of evolution on the planet. Like with Marx, this conception not only overcomes theoretical dualisms between humanity and nature, but also promotes a more detached and less species-centric conception of nature which is fundamental for a better understanding of human beings and of both the potentials and the challenges which emerge throughout the species' history. On the other hand, Elias overcomes Marx's reductionist focus on productive activity by sharing Habermas's awareness of the fundamental role of symbolic communication in differentiating human beings from other animals and in opening up the possibility of learning processes on the

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<sup>516</sup> It is important to note however, that Elias does not establish a dichotomous opposition between more involved and more detached knowledge in which one represents 'true' and the other 'false' knowledge. According to Elias, such dualistic distinctions ignore the extent to which knowledge with high level of fantasy-content has possessed a fundamental 'survival value' for human beings throughout the history of the species. In his view, human beings 'would have been lost in a world which for the greater part they did not and could not know without the capacity for establishing and communicating about imaginary knowledge; [to] fill the gap of their reality-congruent knowledge by means of fantasy knowledge'. In this context, it can be observed that mythological stories involving spirits to explain the rhythm of the seasons constitute symbolically-codified stocks of knowledge which, while having a higher fantasy-content and expressing a more involved perspective than an explanation based on the mechanical laws of planetary motion, still play a fundamental role as a means of orientation on the basis of which human beings can plan their crops and cultivation of fields in a manner which has ensured human survival for millennia. See: Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 93

<sup>517</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 106. As Quilley observes, the principle of increasing facilitation is associated with a 'virtuous loop' between involvement-detachment and safety/danger ratios in human relations with non-human nature, which implies that as the size of the 'relatively insulated' sphere of human safety increases, the achievement of more detached perspectives becomes progressively easier to achieve. In Quilley's view, this virtuous loop explains why knowledge processes and concomitant technological innovations exhibit a 'glacial inertia' in the earlier phases of hominid development and an exponential growth in the more recent phases of human development. See: Quilley, S. 'Ecology, 'human nature' and civilising processes', p. 60.

basis of which people come to expand their capacity to more consciously control both the human and non-human parts of the universe.

Furthermore, Elias brings these two perspectives together on the basis of an approach to the history of the species which, from the start, is aware of the plurality of the human condition. By highlighting the society-specific character of human learning processes and forms of symbolic communication, Elias inherently points to the challenges that are posed by the increased global interconnection of a species which is diverse and characterised by multiple intertwining processes of development. Though a universal characteristic of the species, the society-specific character of human symbolic communication, even if a common language is found, also means that people are prone to misunderstandings and to frequently violent conflicts on the basis of their diverse perspectives and of the various interests that are connected with them.

In this context, we can also argue that Elias's process sociology opens the way for a more comprehensive study of phenomena such as the emergence of unplanned processes out of human conscious interventions in nature, be it the case of unplanned natural processes such as human-made environmental change or of unplanned social processes such as the growth of technological destructive capability to the point in which human beings are now able to threaten their own existence and the continuation of the evolutionary process on Earth. Elias's analysis points to how these unplanned processes might push people back into double-binds in their relations with nature, marked by increased threats by uncontrolled natural forces, a heightening of fears and more involved perspectives at the level of their personality structures, and a lower chance of bringing natural processes under human conscious control. In this manner, Elias's theoretical framework constitutes a more adequate basis on which to analyse not only the constant potential for reversibility of social processes and of the human powers of control, but also how the very success of the species in self-determining its conditions of existence vis-à-vis external nature might lead to the emergence of unplanned processes that undermine its achievements.

As such, Elias can also be understood as recovering Marx's awareness of the need for learning processes regarding how people can tame the unplanned character of their long-term process of development and come to more consciously control their own capacity for control. From the perspective of our inquiry, we can thus argue that Elias shares the critical

authors' interest in orientating people to the reality, the potentials, the limits and the challenges of their global interdependence on the basis of a more detached and cosmopolitan perspective. Moreover, he strives to achieve this perspective by bringing together a materialist and emergentist approach to the species' history and an awareness of the role of society-specific communicative learning processes in its context, which opens the way for a more comprehensive means of orientation which is better equipped to capture the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development.

In this context, we can contrast Elias's materialist and emergentist approach with Habermas's theory of social evolution. In Elias's view, and as we noted above, there is a fundamental distinction to be made between irreversible evolutionary biological processes and reversible developmental social processes. As we saw in chapter five, Habermas's theory of social evolution with its focus on identifying the developmental logic of human development, even though recognising that it does not represent the actual course of human historical events, ends up producing an explanatory model of the structure of the species' history which falls into the latter category, insofar as it is based on a stage-like sequence of irreversible stages of development of moral-practical knowledge at the level of individual world-views and their embodiment in social institutions. As we argued, this explanatory scheme loses the capacity to reconnect back to an analysis of empirical historical events and how these are manifested through shifting relations of power, conflict and interdependence between people in a continuous developmental process which is, at all times, potentially reversible. Habermas's theory of social evolution can thus be said to follow an evolutionary framework which is adequate to understand irreversible processes of biological change but cannot serve as an adequate orientating framework to analyse reversible processes of social change.

On the other hand, Elias's materialist and emergentist approach is inherently based on a developmental and empirical analysis which is focused on understanding the order of change of human development in the direction of both integration and disintegration and thus not only admits of reversibility, but constantly highlights its open-ended and multi-linear character. In this manner, we can argue that Elias's process sociology provides the theoretical basis for an explanatory model of the species' history which more adequately captures its predominant dynamics and social processes and avoids a reproduction of linear

and teleological grand narratives.<sup>518</sup> In the next two subsections, we further support this argument by linking our discussion of Elias's analysis of the development of human control over nature with his writings on the development of civilisation and of people's control over social processes.

## 2.2. Self-control and civilisation

Above, we addressed how Elias's argument regarding the shift in the balance between genetically determined and learning oriented forms of behaviour in humankind shares important themes with Marx's materialist and emergentist approach that highlights how the biological characteristics of the species have conditioned its process of historical development and its capacity to produce its own conditions of existence. Furthermore, we also noticed how Elias builds upon this materialist and emergentist approach by integrating what can be characterised as a Habermasian notion of the role that control over internal human nature plays in the development of the human powers of control over external nature and in the historical emergence of the specific form of life and social existence of human beings. In this section, we further develop this argument by focusing on how Elias recovers not only Habermasian but also important Kantian themes by noting how the development of people's self-control over their internal drives and affects is intertwined with the development of the human networks of social interdependence.<sup>519</sup>

According to Elias, humankind's reliance on learning oriented forms of behaviour means that, from an early age, every child has to learn from other people society-specific

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<sup>518</sup> As Kilminster points out, Elias's distinction between irreversible Darwinian evolution and reversible social processes allows him to locate the development of human symbolic culture and social processes within the broad scheme of biological evolution on Earth without any assumption of teleology. See: Kilminster, R. 'Note on the text' in Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. xvii.

<sup>519</sup> Although in the context of our study we highlight the Kantian and Habermasian elements in Elias's work, his expressed influence regarding the development of people's self-control over their more animalic impulses is rather the work of Freud. Elias deals in particular depth with the influence of Freud in his essay 'Freud's concept of society and beyond it' where he argues that the main difference between his theory of civilising processes and Freud's psychoanalysis is that Freud's theory operates on the basis of a dualism between 'drives as a manifestation of nature' and 'drive regulation as a kind of anti-nature'. Freud thus establishes an opposition between 'nature' and 'civilisation' which Elias contests, given his view that human beings are 'by their very nature' ready for learning patterns of self-regulation which, furthermore, change greatly in the course of humanity's development. As such, the conflicts that Freud observes as 'facts of nature', between the patterns of self-regulation of 'civilised' individuals and their internal drives, appear to Elias as historically specific conflicts, emerging out of particular patterns of human self-regulation, which are liable to undergo change. See: Elias, N. 'Freud's concept of society and beyond' in *Supplements and Interviews* [Collected Works, vol. 18] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2014).

patterns of self-regulation in order to orientate his or her behaviour vis-à-vis other human beings and the non-human natural world. Human social existence is thus dependent on people undergoing learning processes regarding how to exercise self-control over their more animalic drives and affects – such as those towards anger, aggressive behaviour, or sexual desire – in order to be able to live with other people in a manner that does not threaten the sustainability of the social bonds that unite them, and in order to collectively labour upon non-human nature in a manner that produces the material requirements for the satisfaction of their social needs.<sup>520</sup> The exact pattern of socially-standardised behaviour and personal self-regulation is highly changeable between societies and across time. However, no viable human society can exist without it.

In this context, and as already noted in chapter one, Elias introduces what can be considered as a more detached conception of civilisation.<sup>521</sup> In Elias's work, civilisation describes the species-wide process of development of people's capacity to self-control their more animalic impulses; a process which, Elias observes, can assume very diverse and society-specific expressions. As such, while civilisation describes a universal characteristic of humankind, we cannot speak of a single civilising process which is reproduced everywhere in the same manner, but must always bear in mind the existence and interweaving of several society-specific civilising processes which can develop in various ways.<sup>522</sup> Elias's conception of civilisation thus exhibits a more adequate involvement–detachment balance insofar as it promotes a more cosmopolitan orientation towards the universal characteristics which are shared by all members of the species while encompassing the plurality of humankind and its various modes of self-expression.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> Elias, N. 'Civilisation' in *Essays II: On Civilising Processes, State Formation and National Identity* [Collected Works, vol. 15] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>521</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*.

<sup>522</sup> Elias, N. 'Civilisation', pp. 4-5.

<sup>523</sup> Furthermore, as Linklater observes, Elias shares Freud and Foucault's argument that civilisation constitutes a 'milieu favourable to the development of madness', given his claim that 'civilised' self-restraint of internal drives frequently leads individuals to search for happiness and drive satisfaction in 'compensatory fantasy worlds' as well as to a movement of the 'battlefield' of tensions with other people 'within' individuals, in the form of a struggle between each person's more animalic drives and 'super-ego'. In this manner, it can be argued that Elias's conception of civilisation is not normatively charged in a way that interprets civilisation as necessarily 'good', but rather recognises the costs, in terms of personal happiness and satisfaction, that frequently accompany it. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm*, p. 158. However, in this context, we can also advance the argument, developed in greater depth in the next chapter, that, by recognising the malleability of human patterns of self-control, Elias's theory of civilising processes opens the way for a greater degree of conscious regulation of self-restraint, in a manner that alleviates these internal conflicts and tensions and potentially enables a more adequate balance between drive satisfaction and self-restraint.

In Elias's view, civilisation constitutes one the main social processes shaping human historical development, whose study needs to consider both the particularities of different civilising processes and how these intertwine and mutually influence one another as the networks of human interdependence become lengthier and more intricate.<sup>524</sup> His more detailed study of civilisation, found in the book *'On the Process of Civilisation'*, is focused on the long-term civilising process of Western European societies. His intention in this study is not to extrapolate the path that the process of civilisation has followed in Western Europe as the universal path of all civilising processes, but rather to highlight some the main dynamics conditioning its development, on the basis of which a more detached perspective on human civilising processes can then be produced.<sup>525</sup> Elias is thus looking not for a description of civilisation in the form of a stage-like grand narrative of human development which identifies its Habermasian-type of developmental logic, but rather for a theoretical framework capable of capturing the predominant characteristics of civilising processes in general.<sup>526</sup>

In this context, Elias observes that 'human beings are not civilised by nature, but they have by nature a disposition which, under certain conditions, makes possible a civilising

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<sup>524</sup> See: Elias, N. 'Towards a theory of social processes' in *Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities* [Collected Works, vol. 16] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2009), pp. 9-39.

<sup>525</sup> Elias refers to the 'universals' of human societies as fundamental characteristics and dynamics which shape all human developmental processes. For example, Elias argues that 'symbol emancipation' and the need for 'civilised self-restraint' are universal features of all viable human societies, without which the particular form of human life is impossible. However, identifying these characteristics as 'universal' does not mean that Elias considers them to be the same everywhere. Rather, they represent universal dynamics which can assume highly different expressions in different contexts and follow very diverse developmental paths. See: Elias, N. *What is Sociology?*, pp. 99ff.

<sup>526</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*. The majority of analyses of Elias's theory of civilising processes have focused on his observations on the development of people's relations with violence. In particular, on his argument that processes of civilisation entail a long-term increase in social control of violence and aggression and a decline in people's capacity to attain pleasure for participating in, or witnessing, violent acts. In this context, Eric Dunning refers to a taming of people's capacity for obtaining pleasure from attacking others, which can be witnessed in the 'sportisation' of competitive games and events. At the same time, it must be noted that greater social control over violence does not entail its elimination. Rather, Elias observes a tendency to push violence 'behind the scenes', as exemplified by the slaughtering of animals, the veiling of the execution of criminals from public view, or the treatment and punishment of people who derive pleasure from violence through hospitalisation and stigmatisation supported by the language of psychopathology. Once again, it can be observed that Elias shares themes with Foucault, by noting how the taming of violence is not a linear process and is driven by more than simply an expression of humanitarian concerns, involving also practical considerations, such as a concern with public 'decorum', relations of power and 'sanitation'. See: Dunning, E. 'Sociological reflections on sport, violence and civilisation', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 25:1 (1990) pp. 65-82; Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm*, p. 171. For a comparative analysis between Elias's work and Foucault's see: Smith, D. *Norbert Elias and Modern Social Theory*, Chapter 5.

[process]’.<sup>527</sup> It is Elias’s argument that the development of the networks of social interdependence – whose length and intricacy change in accordance with the development of the division of labour and of networks of production and trade within and between human societies – constitutes one of the main dynamics shaping the development of civilisation. In Elias’s view, as the division of labour increases – itself a process intertwined with the development of the human capacity to control non-human nature – human social functions become more specialised, and the degree of mutual dependence between people also increases. Individuals become more tightly bound to each other in longer and more interconnected networks of interdependence in which the satisfaction of their social needs depends more and more on specialised social functions carried out by other people.

As Elias notes, under conditions of growing interdependence, particular social pressures emerge that condition the development of people’s personality structures in a specific direction. In particular, he argues that as the networks of human actions become more complex, extensive and interdependent, individuals are increasingly put under the social pressure to behave in a manner which does not disrupt the chains of mutual actions on which all have come to depend.<sup>528</sup> Hence, individual human beings are socially compelled to attain a more detached perspective of themselves and of their social relations, which is attuned to lengthier and more intricate networks of interdependent actions, and thus to undergo learning processes regarding how to self-regulate their conduct in a manner compatible with the maintenance of these networks of mutual interdependencies in which they are enmeshed.<sup>529</sup> The development of human interdependence is thus concomitant with the development, at the level of people’s personality structures, of more detached perspectives on the basis of which they can better attune their behaviour to the reality of their interdependence, to the spatially and temporally more distant consequences of their actions, and to the social standards of what is deemed socially acceptable behaviour in keeping with the conditions of human social interconnection. People come to be subject to growing social pressures to conform with the socially established patterns of internal regulation of their drives and impulses which, if manifested in a manner that is not

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<sup>527</sup> Elias, N. ‘Civilisation’, p. 3.

<sup>528</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 406.

<sup>529</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 406-458.



compatible with the dominant social standard, might lead to individual social degradation.<sup>530</sup>

Consequently, Elias argues that a central characteristic of any process of civilisation is that as human interdependence increases, the fear of social degradation is incorporated into individual personality structures in the form of a set of internal psychological controls that shape the manifestation of people's drives and inclinations. These socially-instilled internal controls are transmitted to children, from their earliest years, through processes of education and socialisation within the family and in dedicated social institutions in the form of symbolically-codified stocks of knowledge that orientate people's behaviour and internal self-regulation.<sup>531</sup> Elias summarises this development by arguing that as the 'webs of actions grow [more] complex and extensive, the effort required to behave 'correctly' within them becomes so great, that beside the individual's conscious self-control, an automatic, blindly functioning apparatus of self-control is firmly established'.<sup>532</sup> Processes of civilisation can thus be characterised as an increase of the 'social constraint towards self-restraint'.<sup>533</sup> As we address in greater detail in the next chapter, this self-restraint operates more automatically or more consciously in accordance with each individual's personality structure and the pattern of his or her particular relations of interdependence. However, whether consciously or unconsciously, the direction of this transformation of conduct 'is determined by the direction of the process of social differentiation, by the progressive division of functions and by the growth of the interdependency chains into which, directly or indirectly, every impulse, every move of an individual becomes integrated'.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 406. In this context, Elias associates civilising processes with the development of feelings of shame and embarrassment regarding one's and others' behaviour and an overall lowering of the 'threshold of repugnance' as expressions of the change in the people's patterns of self-restraint, of the reduction in direct physical fear of other people, and of the consolidation of more automatic inner fears and anxieties, resultant from the self-constraints that individuals exert over themselves.

<sup>531</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 406.

<sup>532</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 406.

<sup>533</sup> Elias, N. 'Civilisation', p. 4. Elias refers to a changing balance between external and internal constraint towards a predominance of the later. Although the role of the state in ensuring the regulation of individual behaviour through the imposition of external and coercive sanctions continues to be fundamental for the maintenance of viable societies, increasingly, individual agencies of self-control assume a more predominant role in restraining individual behaviour and drive manifestation within socially acceptable parameters. See: Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 365-379 and p. 405ff where he mentions that accompanying the shifting balance between internal and external constraints is a transformation of the modes of 'prestige' sought by males from martial prowess characterised by an uncontrolled release of drives, to a more disciplined and 'civilised' pursuit of monetary success through commercial accomplishments. See also: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm*, p. 164.

<sup>534</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 406.

It is important to note that at no point does Elias establish a causal relation between the development of human interdependence and that of civilisation. He cannot be understood as implying that the growth of human interdependence causes a civilising process. Rather, these two dynamics of human development are better understood as intertwining and mutually reinforcing processes. If, on the one hand, the growth of human interdependence produces the conditions for the development of people's personality structures in a 'civilised' direction, on the other hand, the establishment and maintenance of longer and more interconnected webs of human interdependence is impossible without the development of the capacity of human beings to exercise self-control over their internal drives and impulses and the development of more detached perspectives which encompass wider groups of people in individual calculations about the consequences of one's actions.<sup>535</sup> Moreover, as we addressed in the previous subsection, the very extension of the human powers of control over nature which enables the establishment and development of wider and more intricate networks of human interdependence is also fundamentally connected with people's capacity to develop a more 'civilised' pattern of self-control on the basis of which they are able to achieve a less emotionally coloured and more detached perspective of not only their social relations but also of their relations with the non-human part of the universe.

Furthermore, according to Elias, developmental processes in the direction of civilisation cannot be characterised in purely quantitative terms, as simply implying an increase in self-control.<sup>536</sup> It cannot be said that people under social conditions in which the webs of human interdependence are less developed and the social constraint towards self-restraint is lower have less self-control. On the contrary, there are expressions of extreme forms of self-control and asceticism in these contexts that might no longer be accessible to more 'civilised' individuals. Instead, under these conditions, individual agencies of self-restraint can be characterised as being less even and less uniform than in a

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<sup>535</sup> Elias maintains the need to avoid the establishment of linear causal relations when addressing the dynamics of human development. As Linklater argues, Elias always strives to offer 'multi-causal explanations' which analyse the 'reciprocal relations' between, amongst other social processes, the formation of states' monopolies over the means of violence and taxation, the rise of urban centres and marketized money economies, the lengthening of trade networks and social interdependencies, and the development of people's patterns of self-restraint and modes of behaviour in social relations. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm*, p. 164.

<sup>536</sup> For more on this topic and other frequent 'misinterpretations' of Elias's work see: Wouters, C. and Mennell, S. 'Discussing Civilisation and Informalisation: Criteriology', *Politica y Sociedad*, 50: 2 (2013) pp. 553-579.

more 'civilised' context, and thus more permeable to drives and impulses.<sup>537</sup> Hence, people in conditions of lower social interdependence are more liable to 'wild swings' in their behaviour, with 'extremely strong self-constraints often going hand-in-hand with a capacity for the extremely uncontrolled release of drives and affective impulses'.<sup>538</sup> However, as the webs of human interdependence become tighter and the social constraints towards self-restraint increase, people's self-control tends to become more all-round, more uniform, and more stable, expressing fewer shifts from one situation to another.<sup>539</sup> As such, a developmental process in a civilising direction is better characterised not in quantitative terms of more or less individual self-control, but instead in a more qualitative manner which assesses the evenness and uniformity of the patterns of people's self-regulation of their drives and affects.<sup>540</sup>

When read in the context of our inquiry into the problem of orientation, Elias's study of civilisation points the way to how a more comprehensive understanding can be obtained of some of the main dynamics shaping human development. Like Kant and Habermas, Elias recognises the interconnection between the development of people's capacity for self-control and the universalisation and greater detachment of their perspectives. However, he builds upon this conception by linking these processes with the

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<sup>537</sup> Elias, N. 'Civilisation', p. 5.

<sup>538</sup> Elias, N. 'Civilisation', p. 6.

<sup>539</sup> Elias, N. 'Civilisation', p. 7.

<sup>540</sup> Elias's theory of civilising processes thus sets the stage for an analysis and comparison of different processes of civilisation in a non-evaluative manner, without supposing that the values of some societies are better than others who, somehow, have not followed the 'correct' or 'moral' path of human development. In order for such non-evaluative analyses to be carried out, individuals belonging to societies with a more even pattern of self-control have to achieve a degree of detachment that enables them to maintain an awareness of two fundamental aspects. First, that their own 'civilised' society had its origins in earlier forms of life that had fewer opportunities for more even patterns of self-control because of higher exposure to uncontrolled social and natural processes. And second, that their own conditions of 'civilised' existence are the unfinished product of long-term and predominantly unplanned patterns of social change which not only can undergo, at any moment, sudden reversal, but may also hide within themselves the conditions for a spurt in a 'decivilising' direction. In relation to this last point, Elias argues that civilising processes cannot be understood from a progressivist perspective, but must be seen as always going along with decivilising processes, as expressed by the Nazi practices of industrialised and technicized mass killing which could not have occurred without the level of civilised self-restraint and control enjoyed by Western state societies. The question then becomes which trend has the upper hand at any particular historical juncture, and to what extent it is possible to understand the main dynamics and social processes shaping the development of civilisation, so that it is possible to avoid decivilising trends from becoming predominant. See: Linklater, *The Problem of Harm*, pp. 160-161 and pp.172-173; Mennell, S. 'Decivilising Processes: Theoretical significance and some lines of research', *International Sociology*, 5: 2 (1990) pp. 205-223; Mennell, S. *Norbert Elias: An Introduction* (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 1998); Fletcher, J. *Violence and Civilisation: An Introduction to the Work of Norbert Elias* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997); Swaan, A. 'Dyscivilisation, Mass Extermination and the State', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 18: 2-3 (2001) pp. 265-276.

development of the networks of human interdependence in a specific direction. His analysis of civilisation highlights how the development of more cosmopolitan orientations at the level of people's personality structures, which encompass wider groups of human beings in individual assessments of the standards that should regulate people's behaviour, is intertwined with the growth and deeper interconnectedness of the relations of mutual interdependence between human beings, and with the specific social pressures that arise in their context for the exercise of greater self-control over individual drives and impulses.

However, it must also be noted that this conception does not lead Elias back to a Marxian perspective which establishes a direct causal link between the globalisation of human interdependence and the universalisation of people's perspectives. As we observe in the next subsection, Elias avoids this link by highlighting how the development of civilisation and the growing detachment in people's perspectives are intertwined with the particular patterns of social relations that characterise the networks of human interdependence and with the various positions that individuals and their social groups occupy in the asymmetrical relations of power that structure these networks. Furthermore, Elias observes that these asymmetries of power are fundamentally connected with the development of social processes such as the formation of states and the monopolisation of the means of violence. As we argue throughout the rest of this chapter, Elias's capacity to synthesize these various aspects of human development in a single theoretical framework constitutes the basis for a more comprehensive means of orientation which is capable of attaining a more cosmopolitan perspective that identifies the main dynamics and social processes shaping the development of all civilising processes while recognising that these dynamics do not follow a linear path of development but can lead to multiple, reversible and open-ended expressions of civilisation in accordance with society-specific conditions of existence. Following Elias's analysis of civilisation, the next subsection focuses on its intersection with the development of people's control over social processes.

### **2.3. Civilisation and social control**

In this section we introduce two other of Elias's process sociological concepts, the monopoly mechanism and functional democratisation which, like the notions of involvement-detachment balance and double-bind processes, are used by Elias to describe universal

dynamics shaping the historical development of human beings and structuring the interplay between the three dimensions of the triad of controls. With his notion of monopoly mechanism Elias builds upon Weber's conception of the monopoly over the legitimate means of violence and Marx's notion of a capitalist monopoly over economic functions. It refers to the monopolisation of control over any source of social power within a certain area of human activity by the representatives of one or more social groups. To Elias, a monopoly can thus refer not only to the means of physical violence, but also to a monopoly over taxation, a monopoly over economic functions, or even a monopoly over means of orientation like the one that the Catholic Church exercised for a part of Western European history.<sup>541</sup>

The notion of the monopoly mechanism plays a fundamental role in Elias's analysis of the main patterns of the historical development of the human powers of control over social processes.<sup>542</sup> In this context, Elias can once again be read as bringing together fundamental themes of Kant and Habermas's analyses of the role of state formation and the development of social norms in the expansion of people's capacity to regulate social processes. However, he can also be understood to build upon these themes by providing a more comprehensive understanding of their interconnection with both the development of people's control over non-human nature and the development of peoples' patterning of self-control in the context of civilising processes.

According to Elias, the notion of monopoly mechanism can be summarised in the following manner:

If, in a major social unit, a large number of the smaller units which, through their interdependence, constitute a larger one, are of roughly equal social power and are thus able to compete freely – unhampered by pre-existing monopolies – for the means to social power (...) the probability is high that some will be victorious and others vanquished, and that gradually, as a result, fewer and fewer will control more and more opportunities, and more and more units will be eliminated from competition, becoming directly or indirectly dependent on an ever-decreasing number.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 302.

<sup>542</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 302-311. Elias observes that the centralized control of force and taxation must be understood as two sides of the same monopoly, as neither has precedence over the other, and if one is undermined the other automatically follows. However, for the purpose of clarity, our exposition of Elias's argument focuses predominantly on the dynamics affecting the development of the monopoly over the means of physical violence.

<sup>543</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 302.

As such, human social relations under conditions of free competition tend to slowly 'approach a state in which all opportunities are controlled by a single authority'.<sup>544</sup>

Although Elias develops his notion of the monopoly mechanism in the context of his study of the overall direction of state formation in Western Europe, once again, he identifies this as a universal dynamic which structures human development when conditions of free competition are experienced between different social units vying to achieve control over each other in successive 'elimination contests', but which can assume different developmental paths and historical expressions.<sup>545</sup> For example, according to Elias, as the monopoly mechanism develops, the situation of free competition is transformed within the area of social activity in which the monopoly centre is formed. As an increasingly smaller number of social units acquire greater power chances and incorporate the defeated units, the system of 'open opportunities' that characterises the free competition of their mutual interdependent tensions is transformed into a system of 'closed opportunities'.<sup>546</sup> This can be interpreted as implying that the monopoly mechanism does not have to necessarily lead to the final victory of one social unit over all the others ending in the formation of a central monopoly. In fact, such central monopoly can also be formed by the joint agreement of a smaller number of competing social units in order to secure the collective regulation of their mutual interdependencies and tensions by voluntarily submitting themselves to a set of common social norms. Moreover, Elias also observes that the transition to a system of closed opportunities can occur at one level of social activity while a situation of free competition remains at other levels. For example, while the formation of states implies the consolidation of monopoly control over territories with defined boundaries within which elimination contests cease to operate, in the absence of a central global monopoly, social relations between human groups organised as states can continue to express patterns of free competition in which elimination contests predominate.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 302.

<sup>545</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 308. In this context, Elias notes that a similar process of monopoly formation in the form of a centralised state occurred in China long before it did in Western Europe. See: Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 589.

<sup>546</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 302.

<sup>547</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 302. As Linklater observes, one outcome of Elias's theory of the monopoly mechanism is the argument that the same social processes that led to the formation of European states have been a central dynamic of the whole course of human history, and might continue to dominate world politics until the whole species falls under the dominion of a world state that pacifies the globe. According to Linklater, this argument is advanced by Mennell and finds parallels in International Relations theory in the work of Martin Wight or Alexander Wendt. However, in the next chapter we propose an

In this context, Elias recovers his conception of double-bind processes and applies it to the analysis of human social relations in order to highlight the deep interconnection between the formation of states with a monopoly over the means of physical violence and the expansion of people's capacity to control social processes. As Elias observes, when the means of violence are not yet monopolised by a single centre in a certain area of human activity, but are distributed amongst several human groups in free competition, people constitute a constant source of threat and danger to one another. Under these conditions, the uncontrolled and threatening character of human beings' conditions of existence imply that people's emotions tend to run wild when faced with the fear caused by other human groups and the unleashing of violent aggressive impulses that is required to meet them in battle and contain the danger they represent to one's life, one's community and one's livelihood.<sup>548</sup> As such, people's perspectives of themselves and their social relations tend to present a highly involved character, focused on the point of view of their particular social groups and on an interpretation of social phenomena orientated to an understanding of their meaning regarding their communities' survival. Consequently, people's explanatory models of social processes also tend to be highly involved and ego-centric, frequently based on evaluative distinctions between friends and enemies and in narratives of the mutual threats they pose one another which exhibit a high level of fantasy-content. In Elias's view, people's lower capacity to self-control their internal drives and impulses when living in social conditions of constant mutual threat means that they are unable to achieve a more detached perspective of the interdependencies which lock them together in relations of mutual antagonism, on the basis of which they could hope to attain a more adequate understanding of the social processes in which they are enmeshed and which reinforce the double-bind in which they find themselves.<sup>549</sup> As such, people remain incapable of more consciously intervening in these social processes by collectively self-restraining the threats they pose one another and thus contributing to a lowering of their mutual tensions and an increase in their chances of collectively controlling and diminishing the dangers regarding the survival of their respective communities.

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alternative reading of Elias's conception of the monopoly mechanism, which highlights the possibility for its further development without leading to the formation of a world state. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm*, p. 177.

<sup>548</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 307.

<sup>549</sup> See: Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, pp. 106-109; Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm*, p. 177ff; Mennell, S. *Norbert Elias*, p. 166ff.

In the next chapter, we address how Elias's conception of double-bind processes is applied to his analysis of human social relations in the context of world politics. For now, we focus on how Elias considers that the development of state monopolies over physical force unties the double-bind in human relations within states by contributing to the development of civilisation in a manner that enables an expansion in people's capacity to more consciously control their social processes. According to Elias, on the one hand, the internal pacification of a territory where monopoly control over physical force has been achieved appears as a fundamental condition for the civilisation of human beings. Firstly, because only under such conditions can the networks of human interdependence develop to an extent in which the social constraint towards self-restraint becomes a predominant compulsion in the moulding of individual personality structures. And secondly, because only when people are not under the constant danger of physical violence from each other can they escape the double-bind in human relations and develop a greater degree of self-control over their drives and impulses, in keeping with a substitution of the fear of violence from other people for the fear of social degradation in the eyes of others with whom they are interdependent.<sup>550</sup> On the other hand, a more 'civilised' moulding of individual personality structures is essential for the constitution and maintenance of monopoly structures. Firstly, at the level of the central institutions of the state, the social groups in control of these institutions need to possess both a high degree of self-control and a sufficient level of detachment in their perspectives of social relations for the successful fulfilment of their coordinating functions and regulation of the human web of interdependencies.<sup>551</sup> And secondly, compliance with the social norms regulating social relations, on which the maintenance of the monopoly depends, cannot rely only on compulsion through physical force, but also requires a high degree of voluntary self-restraint on the part of the individuals who carry out their social activities in the area under monopoly control; self-restraint which is based on a higher capacity to tame their internal impulses in keeping with a more detached perspective of the consequences of their actions across the webs of social interdependence on which their social existence depends.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 409.

<sup>551</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 428.

<sup>552</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 411.



According to Elias, the combination of the monopolisation of physical force and the civilising process that the internal pacification of state societies permits, opens up the historical possibility for the formation of institutional centres capable of enacting, and guaranteeing the application of, social norms which regulate human social relations and thus function as channels through which human beings can acquire a greater degree of conscious and collective control over their social processes.<sup>553</sup> In this context, Elias observes that, when viewed in a long-term perspective, the development of people's control over social processes enabled by the formation of monopoly centres appears to fall into two distinct phases structured by the development of the networks of human interdependence and the power asymmetries between human groups that are experienced in their context.<sup>554</sup> In the first phase, the formation of state monopolies over physical violence and taxation frequently represents a loss of control chances over their social processes to the many individuals and groups who are submitted to the monopoly rule but who do not integrate the groups in control of its central institutions. The central monopoly is thus essentially a 'private' monopoly serving the particular interests of a specific stratum of society and increasing its power chances through the control over the networks of social interdependence that its central institutions enable.<sup>555</sup> In this phase, the webs of human interdependence are characterized by great power asymmetries between social groups, with those who are not in control of the central monopoly institutions finding themselves a lot more dependent on the central rulers than the other way around. At this phase in the development of the monopoly mechanism, fundamental questions arise about how to tame the sovereign powers of the state and the arbitrary use of its monopoly over the means of violence and taxation for the benefit of a restricted number of people at the expense of all the others.

However, Elias argues that the historical possibility to answer these questions only arises if a second phase is reached in the development of the monopoly mechanism. This

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<sup>553</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p.309. Once again, we cannot think in terms of a dichotomous opposition between unplanned and planned social processes. Rather, it is preferable to think in terms of a balance which can tilt towards the predominance of one or the other type of social processes in different areas of human social activity. On the one hand, in conditions of free competition, where the balance is tilted towards a predominance of unplanned social processes, these emerge from the interweaving of the planned actions of human beings. On the other hand, when a monopoly over certain areas is formed and gathers the conditions for the balance to be tilted towards a predominance of planned social processes, still, these must be understood as necessarily framed in wider and longer-term processes which are, ultimately, unplanned. See: Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 405.

<sup>554</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 304.

<sup>555</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 304.

second phase depends on whether the webs of human interdependence develop in the direction not only of their increased length and intricacy, but also become characterised by a lowering of power asymmetries between social groups. Whether or not they develop in this direction depends predominantly on the patterns of development assumed by the growth of the division of labour and of the expansion of human production and trade. If the division of labour develops towards a greater specialisation and consequent mutual dependence between social functions, it can lead not only to an expansion of the networks of human interdependence but also to their being increasingly structured by a process of functional democratisation, defined by a reduction of power asymmetries between people as all come to increasingly depend on all the others for both the satisfaction of their social needs and for carrying out their specialised social functions which now can only exist if integrated on an increasingly tighter and more complex web of mutual interdependencies. If such a process of functional democratisation is verified, Elias argues that one of its main consequences is that, increasingly, the operation of the central monopoly can no longer be carried out by a single stratum in control of its institutions. The central rulers come to have to rely more and more on wider strata of society for the maintenance of the monopoly and the carrying out of its regulatory functions.<sup>556</sup> The process of functional democratisation thus implies not only a reduction of power asymmetries between social groups but also a concomitant opening up of control chances to wider groups of people who, having so far been excluded from access to the central monopoly unless they conquered it by force, become capable of influencing the central institutions of the state and their regulation of the whole web of human interdependencies.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 305.

<sup>557</sup> It is important to note that Elias's conception of functional democratisation does not imply a linear model of human development, but rather strives to capture one of its main dynamics and how it assumes different expressions at particular historical junctures and under specific conditions of existence. As Mennell argues at the end of his study on the American civilising process, functional democratisation is always liable to go into 'reverse'. In particular, he observes that the more recent phase of development of free market capitalism appears to express a tendency for an increase in the power asymmetries between human groups and a less equal distribution of power chances to control the monopoly centres enacting social norms and making decisions regarding the development of the global economy. Furthermore, Mennell considers that a reversal of functional democratisation might be accompanied by a transformation of people's patterning of self-restraint in the direction of 'decivilisation', namely, by a reduction of mutual identification between human beings and a freer expression of more aggressive and dominating impulses in social relations, especially in the context of great asymmetries of power and mutual dependence between people. See: Mennell, S. *The American Civilising Process* (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2007), pp. 294-322.

Furthermore, Elias observes that intertwined with these processes is the development of people's personality structures in a more 'civilised' direction. In Elias's assessment, the expansion and functional democratisation of the webs of human interdependence is only possible because it is concomitant with the development of civilisation towards patterns of individual self-control characterised by more even and uniform internal regulation of people's drives and impulses and a growing detachment in their perspectives of social relations. This greater detachment implies that individuals enmeshed in more interdependent networks of humanity acquire the capacity to more adequately attune to the reality of their social interdependence and to encompass wider groups of people in their individual calculations regarding the consequences of their actions and how to regulate their behaviour and the expression of their drives and impulses. Hence, the lowering of power asymmetries between people can be said to be accompanied by the development of more detached perspectives at the level of individual personality structures which imply two fundamental changes in people's overall modes of orientation towards each other and the world. On the one hand, in developing more universal modes of attunement to other people across wider networks of interdependent humanity, individuals also develop tighter forms of mutual emotional identification with each other that arise from their understanding of the degree of their mutual interconnectedness and the consequences of their actions on each other's lives and well-being. On the other hand, people also come to be more attuned to the fact that the lowering of power asymmetries not only means that they can influence the exercise of social regulation by the central state monopoly, but also that the complexity of the web of human interdependencies implies that it can only be more consciously controlled in a manner that avoids its more harmful unplanned effects and which is more compatible with human needs, if it comes under the collective control of all human beings who are enmeshed in its bounds of social interconnection. Progressively then, people come to be attuned to the possibility of collectively acquiring greater conscious control over their social processes and conditions of existence through deliberative and democratic decision-making processes regarding the social norms that should regulate social life and individual behavioural expectations and which must encompass all human beings who stand to be affected by them. As Elias observes, the lowering of power asymmetries

leads people to realise that 'opportunities that had previously to be won by individuals through military or economic force can now become amenable to planning'.<sup>558</sup>

According to Elias, the monopoly rulers can acknowledge the need to democratise the central monopoly and impose on themselves the self-restraints and the sharing of power with other strata of society which the reduction in power asymmetries entails, or they can attempt to preserve their private control of the central monopoly and continue to direct its operation only to the satisfaction of their interests and needs and to the increase of their power chances. However, in conditions of high social interdependence moving towards a reduction of power asymmetries, the later course of action becomes increasingly harder to maintain without leading to potentially violent social conflicts in the form of either revolutions that force a change in the monopolist holders of sovereign power and a widening of monopoly control to other strata, or of civil wars that might push the web of human interdependencies into a condition of social degradation and regression to a situation in which the maintenance of a central monopoly is no longer possible and the social unit becomes divided between smaller groups in violent competition with each other.<sup>559</sup>

The second phase of monopoly development is thus characterised by an overall movement in the direction of its growing 'socialisation', as 'the privately owned monopoly in the hands of a single individual or family comes under the control of broader social strata, and transforms itself, as the central organ of the state, into a public monopoly'.<sup>560</sup> The central sovereign is thus brought under the control of the whole society through the enactment of social norms which, guaranteed in their application by the state monopoly over the means of violence, regulate the operation of the monopoly itself, and become the product of democratic processes of decision-making.<sup>561</sup> As such, the control of the state

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<sup>558</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 309.

<sup>559</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 305.

<sup>560</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 305.

<sup>561</sup> In this context, Elias also observes that processes of functional democratisation refer not only to shifting balances of power between social groups but also between the sexes. Hence, Elias refers to a taming of aggressive masculinities, which can be observed throughout the civilising process of Western Europe, as warriors are transformed into courtiers and the asymmetries of power between men and women are reduced. See: Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 288ff; Elias, N. 'The changing balance of power between the sexes – a process-sociological study: the example of the ancient Roman state' in *Essays II*, pp. 240-265. See also: Liston, K. 'Sport and Gender Relations' in *Matters of Sport: Essays in honour of Eric Dunning*, edited by Dominic Malcom and Ivan Waddington (Oxon, Routledge, 2008), pp. 114-132; Liston, K. 'Revisiting the

monopoly stops being the unplanned outcome of the 'vicissitudes of free competition' between different social groups to become instead based on a planned sharing of power chances that depends on 'regularly recurring elimination contests without the force of arms, (...) and thus by 'unfree' competition'.<sup>562</sup> In other words, the control of the state monopoly becomes democratic, regulated by clearly defined social norms, circumscribing the competition and behavioural expectations between different groups as they strive to achieve greater influence over its central institutions.<sup>563</sup> The socialisation of the central monopoly and its transformation into a public monopoly thus implies that the central rulers become public functionaries who operate the state monopoly in the interests of the whole of society, as represented in its central democratic institutions. The opportunities and power chances provided by the monopoly become allocated less by 'personal favour and in the interest of individuals, but increasingly according to a more impersonal and precise plan in the interest of many interdependent associates, and finally in the interests of an entire interdependent human figuration'.<sup>564</sup>

Our reading of Elias's work as an answer to the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation thus leads us to argue that Elias's process sociology enables a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of developmental processes already identified by the critical authors as fundamental in the long-term history of the species and in the expansion of the human powers of self-determination. Like the critical authors, Elias recognises the fundamental role of the growing detachment and universalisation of people's perspectives for an expansion of their capacity to more consciously control social processes. However, Elias develops upon this conception by introducing the awareness that the development of more detached orientations depends not only on the expansion of the human networks of interdependence, as noted by Marx, or on the logic of development of moral-practical knowledge, as advanced by Habermas, but also on the patterns of mutual power asymmetries between human groups. If the webs of human interdependence become wider but remain structured by high levels of power asymmetries, there is a high chance that individual personality structures will not become more universally attuned and their

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Feminist-Figurational Sociology Exchange', *Sport in Society*, 10:4 (2007), pp. 623-646; Mennell, S. *Norbert Elias*, p. 25ff.

<sup>562</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 309.

<sup>563</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 309.

<sup>564</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 309.

personal perspectives will remain bound to the parochial and more involved perspectives of their social groups. Under these conditions, human beings' emotional identification does not extend to people outside their immediate communities and social relations continue to be perceived in a predominantly involved and ego-centric manner, looking for their meaning regarding the survival and interests of people's particularistic communities. On the other hand, the development of more cosmopolitan modes of orientation is linked to the lowering of power asymmetries between people, on the basis of which more universal forms of attunement and identification can develop and more detached and less ego-centric perspectives can orientate people in conceiving of their social relations in terms of blind unplanned social processes arising out of the interweaving of human actions and which can only come under greater conscious control if this control is ultimately exercised by the whole web of interdependent humanity. Elias's process sociology can thus be understood to provide a more comprehensive approach to the study of the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping human development and circumscribing the development of more cosmopolitan perspectives at the level of people's personality structures.

Moreover, we can also argue that this more comprehensive approach constitutes the sociological basis for the study of the historical emergence of the more universalistic forms of attunement and moral sentiment which are identified in Kant and Habermas's works. Effectively, Elias opens up the possibility for the development of a sociology of morals which captures the universalisation of people's moral orientations on a historical and sociological basis which is no longer focused on a transcendental assessment of the ideal conditions of morality and freedom or on the logic of their development, but rather on an identification of the material and social conditions under which particular forms of moral attunement arise historically.<sup>565</sup> As such, rather than looking for a transcendental and universal conception of morality on the basis of which to evaluate its historical expression, Elias's process sociology can be said to be more concerned with understanding the historical processes through which moral development itself is possible and what it implies. We can thus argue that Elias advances a materialist and emergentist approach to these topics which recognises that more universalistic modes of orientation, and the disclosure of moral principles such as those of

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<sup>565</sup> This line of inquiry has been particularly developed by Linklater in his project to synthesize English School theory, critical theory and Eliasian process sociology. See: Linklater, A. 'Towards a sociology of global morals with an 'emancipatory intent'', *Review of International Studies*, 33 (2007) pp. 135-150 and Linklater, A. *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States System*.

Habermas's discourse ethics, do not depend on their transcendental ascertainment but rather that these principles emerge historically in accordance with the patterns of development of human interdependence, the asymmetries of power between human beings and the development of people's personality structures.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we addressed Elias's process sociology to argue that it opens the way out the impasse that has been reached with critical theory's engagement with the problem of orientation. We have shown how Elias's detour via detachment leads him to develop a materialist and emergentist approach to human development which can be understood as providing a higher synthesis between Marxian, Kantian and Habermasian approaches. Elias's study of human development in a long-term perspective was thus identified as providing the basis for not only a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of controls in the species' history but also for an explanatory model of human development which captures its multi-linear and open-ended character in a manner that better avoids the reproduction of modernist myths. As such, we have argued that Elias's process sociology points us in the direction of what needs to be done in order to develop a more adequate means of orientation regarding the history of the species and the development of the human powers of control, which enables the attainment of a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition while recognising and protecting the fundamental plurality of humankind.

In the next chapter, we return to these themes to observe how Elias applies his process sociological approach to the study of world politics and argue that it provides the basis for a more comprehensive assessment of the predominant social processes shaping the globalisation of the species and the development of more detached perspectives on the basis of which people can more adequately orientate towards their global interconnection. However, we also note that Elias's focus on the explanatory dimension of orientation and his constant postponement of an engagement with the more involved assessment of how to actualise the immanent potentials gathered at each historical juncture for an expansion of the human powers of self-determination means that, by itself, process sociology is incapable of answering both dimensions of the problem of orientation. While constituting a more

adequate framework for an answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation, process sociology remains unable to address how people can come to exercise a greater degree of conscious control over the pressing challenges that arise from human global interdependence in the form of, just to name a few, environmental change, the danger of nuclear inter-state conflict or mass movement of refugee populations. These observations leads us to argue that the development of a more adequate orientating framework – capable of addressing both dimensions of the problem of orientation and attune people to the reality of their global interdependence and to the potentials and limits it implies regarding their more conscious control of their conditions of existence – ultimately depends on the production of a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory, capable of recovering the critical authors' more involved normative commitment to the expansion of human self-determination on the basis of Elias's more detached, multi-linear and open-ended model of the species' history.



## **Chapter Seven**

### **Towards a synthesis**

In this chapter, we continue our reading of Elias's work from the perspective of our inquiry into the problem of orientation by addressing his application of a process sociological approach to the study of world politics. In this context, we introduce two other Elisian concepts, 'we-I balance' and 'we-images', that reinforce our argument regarding Elias's capacity to open the way for a more adequate explanatory model of the history of the species. In particular, we note that Elias is capable of developing a more cosmopolitan perspective on the conditions of existence of globalised humanity, while maintaining an awareness of the plurality of the species that avoids a reproduction of the type of modernist myths that affect the works of the critical authors.

However, we also note that, despite the potential of Elias's process sociology for the development of a more adequate answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation, still, it does not constitute a substitute to a critical engagement with the problem of orientation. Although Elias conceptualises the relation between involvement and detachment as a balance, his awareness of the dangers inherent in premature answers which, based on a still insufficient and unreliable fund of knowledge, address the question of how human beings can exercise more control over their conditions of existence, leads him to constantly postpone the completion of his detour via detachment through a secondary re-involvement. One which, on the basis of his multi-linear and open-ended model of human development, provides a more adequate answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation by addressing how people might come to further expand their capacity for self-determination and what principles should orientate them in attaining a more conscious regulation of their networks of global interdependence. Elias's writings on world politics are particularly expressive of this tension. They are focused on providing a more reliable assessment of the conditions shaping the globalisation of the species and the development of more cosmopolitan perspectives at the level of people's personality structures in a manner that recognises how these processes are the outcome of the interweaving of multiple paths of human development and society-specific forms of civilisation. However, Elias constantly avoids translating this more detached analysis of the conditions of existence of global humanity into a more involved assessment

of what historical potentials these social processes gather for the expansion of human beings capacity to more consciously navigate the future stages of the global integration of the species.

This analysis of Elias's work leads us to conclude that a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation requires the production of a means of orientation that expresses an involvement–detachment balance which is capable of maintaining the tension between the search, on the one hand, for a more detached and cosmopolitan perspective on human historical development and the conditions of existence of global humanity and, on the other hand, a more involved interpretation of its meaning for the contemporary concerns of the species and the assessment of the conditions under which human beings might come to exercise greater control over their future development. As such, we argue that Elias's process sociology can help us move in the direction of this more adequate answer to the problem of orientation not by acting as a substitute of critical theoretical engagements with the study of human development and world politics, but rather if brought into a higher synthesis with critical theory which is capable of simultaneously sustaining Elias's detached, multi-linear and open-ended explanatory model of human development, and produce a more involved anticipatory assessment of its implications for the future development of the human powers of control. Such a synthesis would thus constitute a more adequate means of orientation on the basis of which human beings could attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on their conditions of existence which not only recognises and protects the plurality of the species, but also enables people to better understand themselves, their long-term process of development and how they might come to make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing.

It lies outside this study's time and length limitations to pursue such a synthetic endeavour. As such, the purpose of this chapter is rather to take the first steps in establishing the theoretical basis for the future pursuit of this project. In order to fulfil this objective, the present chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, we address Elias's work on world politics, where we focus on an analysis of double-bind processes and the monopoly mechanism at the level of human inter-state relations. This analysis leads us to a discussion of some of the limitations of process sociology's emphasis on detachment, in the context of which we make a case for a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory. In the second section, we carry out a reading of Elias's

work from a critical theoretical perspective which highlights some common themes between process sociology and critical theory that point us in the direction of how this synthesis might be achieved. In particular, we argue that Elias's multi-linear and open-ended model of human development opens the way for a recovery of Marx's non-transcendental engagement with the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation in a manner that enables a more adequate assessment of the historical potential, gathered at the level of world politics, for an expansion of people's capacity to bring their conditions of existence under a greater degree of conscious and collective control.

### **1. World politics in a process sociological perspective**

In this section we address Elias's reflections on world politics. We focus our analysis not only on the already discussed conceptions of monopoly mechanism and double-bind processes, but also introduce two other core concepts of Elias's work: the 'we-I balance' and 'we-images'. In this context, we reinforce our argument regarding how process sociology opens the way for a more adequate answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation in so far as it provides a more comprehensive analysis of the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development at the level of world politics that captures the conditions shaping the globalisation of the species and how global relations between human survival units are shaped by the interplay between the different dimensions of the triad of controls. Furthermore, this section also establishes the basis for the discussion of the limitations of Elias's emphasis on detachment and the need to carry out a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory which permits a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation.

This section is divided into two subsections. First, we address Elias's conception of the interplay between the we-I balance and we-images in his analysis of the development of regional and global associations of states. Second, we analyse the relation between double-bind processes and the monopoly mechanism in Elias's study of world politics.

### 1.1. The 'we-I balance' in post-national associations of states

In the previous chapter, we addressed Elias's conception of the monopoly mechanism as one of the predominant dynamics shaping human historical development. In that context, we noted Elias's argument that the formation and subsequent functional democratisation of monopolies of force and taxation at the state level implies a reduction of free competition between human groups and enables a greater degree of collective control over the conditions of human existence inside states. In this section, we address how Elias extends his analysis of the monopoly mechanism to world politics and argues, in a manner which echoes the realist position in International Relations, that the absence of a global monopoly of force implies that relations between states continue to be predominantly defined by free competition and elimination contests.<sup>566</sup> As such, the monopoly mechanism remains the predominant dynamic shaping relations between different human survival units and pushing them into unplanned and uncontrolled conflicts with each other.<sup>567</sup> However, as we demonstrate in this section, Elias also moves significantly beyond the realist position by framing his analysis of world politics in his conception of civilising processes, and thus tracing the interplay between the changing patterns of power asymmetries and relations of interdependence between states and the development of their citizens' personality structures.<sup>568</sup>

According to Elias, especially since the end of the Second World War, and in keeping with the expansion of human networks of production and trade and the growing global

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<sup>566</sup> According to Linklater, Elias's work shares a 'tragic' conception of world politics with classical realism by identifying the 'paradox' of the long-term direction of human development expressed in the formation of internally highly pacified states, while the scale of the wars between them increases in its destructive impact given the absence of a worldwide monopoly of power which pacifies inter-state relations in a manner similar to intra-state monopolies of force. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 178.

<sup>567</sup> In this context, Elias refers to a 'split in civilisation' experienced by the citizens of states with a stable internal monopoly of power and characterised by a 'duality of normative codes' according to which the 'civilised' standards of self-restraint that people observe in their mutual relations inside states contrast with the more permissive attitudes towards violence which are permitted, and even encouraged, in their relations with the citizens of other states, especially in the context of war and violent conflict. See: Elias, N. *Studies on the Germans* [Collected Works, vol. 11] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2013). See also: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 178 and Mennell, S. 'The Globalisation of Human Society', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7: 2 (1990) p. 362ff.

<sup>568</sup> As John Hobson argues, Elias's process sociology offers the means to go beyond the crude materialism of Waltzian neorealism by providing an approach to human social processes which captures the relation between 'socio-psychological/emotional, normative and identity-based processes as well as changes in material forces'. See: Hobson, J. 'Reconfiguring Elias: Historical Sociology, the English School and the Challenge of International Relations', *Human Figurations: long-term perspectives on the human condition*, 1: 2 (2012).

division of labour, there has been a predominant tendency for the formation of regional and global associations of states with a view to exercising greater collective regulation over the dynamics of human global interdependence.<sup>569</sup> As Elias's notes, the formation of these supranational organisations can be understood as expressing an early stage in the development of supranational monopolies. Furthermore, such supranational associations represent not only the unplanned outcome of elimination contests between survival units, but are also the result of a planned pooling of sovereignty between different states, as a strategy to acquire a greater degree of collective and conscious control over their conditions of interdependent existence.<sup>570</sup>

In this context, Elias returns to his previous analysis of the dynamics of development of the monopoly mechanism to argue that the formation of higher monopoly centres, beyond the state level, implies an initial loss of power and control chances for the individuals caught up in these processes and the social units which they integrate. He observes that in the transition between the tribal and the state level the same dynamic implies that, as different tribes come to integrate a higher level monopoly over physical violence and taxation in the form of a state, the power resources of tribal authorities are reduced in favour of those of the state authorities<sup>571</sup>. Hence, individuals who, in previously self-governing tribes, had a greater capacity to participate in, and influence, decision-making processes at the tribe level, now find themselves at a greater distance from the social centres of power and losing their control chances over the central decision-making processes. Similarly, the integration of sovereign states in regional and global associations of states also expresses a progressive shift of power from the state level to the continental and global levels.<sup>572</sup> The power chances that individuals have in parliamentary democracies to collectively control their conditions of existence inside the state is increasingly eroded by decision-making processes taking place at the level of emerging supranational institutions, over which they have little influence.<sup>573</sup>

Furthermore, Elias observes that one of the main dynamics shaping the development of the monopoly mechanism at the level of world politics is the interplay between, on the

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<sup>569</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals* [Collected Works, vol. 10] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2010) p. 150.

<sup>570</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 150.

<sup>571</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 148.

<sup>572</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 148.

<sup>573</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 148.

one hand, the global patterns of interdependence and power asymmetries between human survival units and, on the other hand, the development of people's personality structures and forms of mutual identification. In this context, Elias introduces his twin concepts of we-I balance and we-images in order to capture these dynamics and trace their multi-linear and open-ended development. In the book *'Society of Individuals'*, he characterises the concept of 'we-images' as referring to people's self-image as individuals and groups. Recovering his previous analysis of civilising processes, Elias argues that this image can expand or contract to embrace more or less people in accordance with the length and intricacy of the webs of human interdependence, with the development of functional democratisation and the asymmetries of power between human groups, and with the concomitant development of people's personality structures in a more 'civilised' direction implying more even and uniform patterns of self-control and the attainment of more detached perspectives of themselves and their social relations.<sup>574</sup> Elias's analysis thus points for the existence of a mutually reinforcing connection between the growth of the human webs of interdependence, the functional democratisation of power asymmetries between human groups, and the widening of people's perspectives to assume a more cosmopolitan character, on the basis of which their we-images come to progressively encompass larger social units and groups of interdependent people.<sup>575</sup>

According to Elias, the widening of people's we-images does not entail the elimination of their identification with those social groups at a lower level of integration; instead, individuals develop 'multi-layered' personality structures that encompass several levels of mutual identification with other people, as each individual becomes his or her own personal focus of several intermeshing 'planes of integration'.<sup>576</sup> As such, Elias observes that, for example, pre-historic hunter-gatherer groups might have had only a single plane of integration in their members' we-images referring to familial bonds. However, as the division of labour advances and human interdependence grows, the expression 'we' starts to have 'many layers' and can refer, simultaneously, to family, clan, tribe, state, or other groups of interdependent human beings.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 192.

<sup>575</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 151.

<sup>576</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 151.

<sup>577</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 151. Addressing Elias's conception of we-images, Mennell observes that the widening of people's we-images is always liable to go into reverse, even if a long-term trend in that

In this context, Elias's introduces his conception of the 'we-I balance', as a way to observe the transition of people's mutual identification through these different planes of integration. Both the 'I' and the 'we' in this concept can refer to different layers of human self-images, in accordance with which plane of integration we're considering. Hence, the 'I' in this relationship can refer not only to an individual human being, but also to a social unit in any plane of integration which is enmeshed in several layers of we-images. It can refer to the balance between an individual and his family, a family and a tribe, a tribe and a state, or a state and an association of states.<sup>578</sup> It is an orientating concept which functions as a 'tool of observation and reflection (...) [and matches] the multi-layered aspect of we-conceptions, (...) the plurality of interlocking planes of integration characteristic of human societies at their present stage of development'.<sup>579</sup>

By using the notion of a balance Elias refers to the fact that, frequently, one of the several layers of we-images interlocking in an individual possesses a certain prominence over the others.<sup>580</sup> This layer most commonly corresponds to the individual's membership of a particular survival unit, such as a nation-state, which he or she considers the prime unit of allegiance and which most predominantly shapes the individual's self-image and modes of attunement towards other people and the world. The notion of a balance captures the shifting preponderance of one or other we-image in individual personality structures; a balance which changes with the transformation of the patterns of mutual interdependence and power between people.<sup>581</sup> Hence, for example, Elias observes, with reference to his study of the civilising process in Western Europe, that in earlier phases of the formation of state monopolies, when the asymmetries of power chances to influence the central institutions of the state are still very high and the central monopoly still assumes a predominantly private character, the we-I balance in people's personality structures tends

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direction has been verified. He refers to the events in the former Yugoslavia as one of several possible historical examples of a situation in which 'less inclusive layers of identity', especially ethnic ones, are socially constructed and become more affectively charged than the previous identification with the nation. See: Mennell, S. 'The Formation of We-Images: A Process Theory' in *Norbert Elias*, edited by Eric Dunning and Stephen Mennell (London, Sage, 2003), p. 179.

<sup>578</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 151.

<sup>579</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 151. In this context, Mennell observes that the image of several interlocking places on integration at the level of individual self-images should not be understood as a purely ego-centric conception of identity, as individual self-images are always necessarily intermeshed and in relations of mutual influence with the we-images of the social groups to which they belong. See: Mennell, S. 'The Formation of We-Images', p. 179.

<sup>580</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 164.

<sup>581</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 164.

to be significantly tilted towards the we-image of the tribe vis-à-vis the still emerging we-image of the nation.<sup>582</sup> On the other hand, at a later phase in the development of state monopolies – when these have undergone a process of socialisation which transforms them into public monopolies, and a process of functional democratisation which ensures a more even distribution of power chances between different strata of society – people's we-I balance also tilts predominantly towards the we-image of the nation vis-à-vis that of smaller tribes integrated in the state.<sup>583</sup>

Once again, it is important to observe that the relation between monopoly formation and the development of we-images is not one of cause and effect, nor does it express a linear and teleological conception of human development. On the one hand, for example, national we-images cannot form without the functional democratisation of the central state monopoly but, simultaneously, such democratisation also depends on a widening of people's we-images beyond their particular familial and tribal groups to encompass the nation as a source of common identification. On the other hand, these processes are not only liable to undergo regressions can but also block each other's' interdependent development.

In this context, Elias argues that it is possible to observe that, frequently, people's most prominent we-images in the we-I balance tend to lag behind the level of integration already achieved by their relations of mutual interdependence. He thus talks about the 'drag-effect' of people's we-images which can block the formation and socialisation of monopoly centres at a higher level of integration.<sup>584</sup> For example, Elias observes that even though the human species has become increasingly interdependent at the global level, still, 'it is not an exaggeration to say that, for most people, humankind as a frame of reference for we-identity is a blank space on the map of their emotions'.<sup>585</sup> People's perspectives and

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<sup>582</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 186.

<sup>583</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 186.

<sup>584</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 189.

<sup>585</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 181. According to Elias, one of the main challenges in the development of people's we-images encompassing the whole of humankind is that there are no external threats to the human species as a whole. While we-images at lower levels of integration always developed on the basis of insider-outsider distinctions and in the context of the survival threats posed by other human groups, humanity is not threatened by non-human sources (with the possible exception of potential cosmic collisions or the activity of some viruses and bacteria), but only by the social dynamics of human development itself. In the absence of survival threats posed by non-human beings, such as the inhabitants of another solar system, it is harder for people to recognise the fact that humanity is increasingly becoming the main survival unit for all humans. See: Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 204.



basic modes of attunement continue to express higher levels of involvement, and remain locked to the particularistic and parochial perspectives of the social groups which characterise their predominant we-images, with the majority of human beings so far remaining unable to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective which matches the conditions of global interdependence which are experienced by every member of the species. According to Elias, such drag-effects can be found in the development of all planes of integration of human interdependence. Hence, in the same manner that we can talk about a drag-effect of national we-images vis-à-vis, for example, the continental level of integration in the form of the European Union, many contemporary states in Africa and other parts of the world also deal with the drag-effect of tribal we-images in the formation of state monopolies.<sup>586</sup>

Elias explains these drag-effects by observing the 'survival function' that social units at different levels of integration provide to human individuals and which produces specific types of emotional bond, even when these social units have become increasingly obsolete in that function as a result of growing human interdependence.<sup>587</sup> This survival function should be understood not only in terms of physical security and protection from the violence of other human groups, but also refers to the fact that, 'by virtue of its continued tradition, membership in [a particular survival unit] grants the individual a chance of survival beyond actual physical existence, survival in the memory of the chain of generations'.<sup>588</sup> As such, 'the continuity of a survival group, which finds expression in the continuity of its language, the passing down of legends, history, music and many other cultural values, is itself one of the survival functions of [social units]'.<sup>589</sup> More often than not, changes to the prominence of we-images expressing a higher plane of integration represent a 'loss of meaning' and a 'forgetting' of aspects of the we-images that characterise people's personality structures at a lower level of integration; as can be witnessed in the historical transition from tribal to national we-images.<sup>590</sup> As such, Elias argues that even if it makes perfect rational sense,

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<sup>586</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p.191. As Linklater observes, there is no guarantee that these drag-effects might not gain the upper hand in the future development of the species. It is possible that the immense process of global integration that humanity is undergoing is followed by a 'dominant disintegration process' and by a 'decivilising counter spurt' in which attachments to smaller survival units and nation-states become even stronger. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 184.

<sup>587</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 197.

<sup>588</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 200.

<sup>589</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 200.

<sup>590</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 201.

given the present phase in the development of human global interdependence, for the European states to combine into a continental association, still, the development of European we-images represents a loss at the level of national we-images, a loss that many human beings 'cannot cease mourning'.<sup>591</sup>

In this context, we can recall our analysis of Habermas's work to argue that his proposal for the development of dual constitutional subjects in supranational organisations at both the regional and the global levels of integration can be understood, from a process sociological perspective, as representing an attempt at overcoming the drag-effects of national we-images, while not incurring in the unbearable costs – in the form of loss of national meaning and identity – associated with the development of supranational we-images. Furthermore, his observations on constitutional patriotism as a change in people's emotional identification from the nation to the constitutional principles which they deliberately agree to also represents an attempt to conceptualise how people's we-images can be widened to encompass social units at a higher plane of integration.<sup>592</sup> Habermas's proposals thus strive to orientate people towards a more adequate involvement–detachment in their perspectives, on the basis of which they can attune in a more cosmopolitan manner to the global web of humanity while preserving their society-specific differences and cultural self-expressions.

However, Elias can also be understood as opening the way for a more comprehensive approach than that of Habermas, Kant or Marx. As seen above, and as we argue in greater detail in the next subsection, Elias is able to provide a more adequate understanding of how the development of people's perspectives is intertwined with the development of the triad of controls and with social processes at both the intra-societal and the inter-societal levels. In particular, his theoretical linkage between the drag-effects experienced at the level of people's we-images, the development of human global

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<sup>591</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 201. In this context, Smith argues that even though, under conditions of global interdependence, the crucial level of integration, as far as survival is concerned, now lies above the state level, people's emotional attachments to their respective nations implies that treating the state level as somehow secondary is experienced as a 'kind of death', which provokes intense emotional responses that 'overwhelm' the dictates of 'utilitarian rationality'. See: Smith, D. *Norbert Elias and Modern Social Theory*, p. 143.

<sup>592</sup> According to Florence Delmotte, Elias's work constitutes a fundamental contribution to further develop Habermas's conception of 'constitutional patriotism' on a more sociological basis. See: Delmotte, F. 'About Post-National Integration in Norbert Elias's Work: Towards a Socio-Historical Approach', *Human Figurations: Long-term perspectives on the human condition*, 1: 2 (2012).

interdependence and power asymmetries, and the development of people's internal patterning of self-control in a more or less 'civilised' direction can constitute the basis for a sociological analysis of the predominant social processes shaping the development of more cosmopolitan and detached perspectives at the level of people's personality structures which, while identified in the critical authors' works, tend to be conceived by them in a linear and teleological manner. As such, Elias's process sociological approach can help us in the production of a more adequate answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation which captures the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development and how various intermeshing dynamics and social processes shape it in different directions.

### **1.2. Double-bind processes and monopoly formation**

In the book *'Humana Conditio'*, Elias weaves together several threads of his process sociological approach in a study of world politics that highlights the interplay between the development of people's modes of attunement and we-images with the different dimensions of the triad of basic controls. In particular, Elias observes that the untying of the double-bind which some sections of humanity achieved at the level of human relations with non-human nature has led to a long-term process of development of human military technology and destructive capacity which has fundamental consequences for the conditions of existence of the species and the future operation of the monopoly mechanism. Finding its most dramatic expression in the nuclear revolution, the development of human technological capacity has made elimination contests between states an increasingly 'obsolete' mode of carrying out power struggles and solving conflicts, since such contests imply the realistic possibility of escaping human control in a manner that might threaten with destruction a considerable part of the world's population, as well as make large areas of the planet inhospitable to life.<sup>593</sup>

Still, Elias argues, the particular pattern of human global interdependence implies that world politics continue to be predominantly shaped by social dynamics that push the web of humanity in the direction of unplanned and uncontrolled forms of competition and elimination contests between survival units. According to Elias, these dynamics can be most

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<sup>593</sup> Elias, N. *Humana Conditio* [Collected Works, vol. 6] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2010) p. 126.

adequately understood through the application of his concept of double-bind processes to the analysis of inter-societal relations between human survival units.<sup>594</sup> By applying the concept to the study of world politics, Elias observes that a circular movement can be observed shaping the conditions of existence of globalised humanity. The absence of a global monopoly of force which ensures the pacification of inter-state relations, together with the concomitant sovereign control by several states of highly destructive means of violence, implies that the species is still fundamentally locked in a situation in which different survival units pose high levels of mutual danger and threat to each other, to which correspond, at the level of individual personality structures, highly involved perspectives and modes of orientation towards their social relations and the wider web of interdependent humanity.<sup>595</sup> As such, people's perspectives on world politics exhibit a high level of involvement and their explanatory models of inter-state relations and conflicts are characterised by the predominance of fantasy-content directed towards the assessment of their meaning from the ego-centric point of view of human survival units and their particular interests.

According to Elias, while in relations with non-human nature these more involved perspectives imply that the question of 'who is to blame' for the threats and dangers to which human beings are exposed from uncontrolled natural forces is frequently answered with reference to the intentional agency of spirits and other supernatural forces, in the context of world politics, they frequently lead to collective national narratives that portray situations of inter-state conflict as being predominantly the fault of the opposing state.<sup>596</sup> Consequently, when different states are locked together in relations of mutually interdependent conflict and competition, their populations tend to assume highly involved perspectives of their situation which portray each other as the 'aggressor' whose intentional actions produce the threatening and dangerous conditions of existence which they all experience.<sup>597</sup>

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<sup>594</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 114.

<sup>595</sup> In Linklater's assessment, there is a strong parallel between Elias's analysis of double-bind processes in the context of world politics and the realist conception of the 'security dilemma'. Double-binds refer to specific security dilemmas and to their cumulative effect on the overall process of human development, as an outcome of the 'spiral effect' produced, in the absence of a global monopoly of power, by the competitive accumulation of means of violent destruction by survival units and its link with a heightening of fear, uncertainty and suspicion in their mutual relations, that none of them can bring under control. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 177. See also: Booth, K. and Wheeler, N. *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>596</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 138.

<sup>597</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 138ff.

The function of these ego-centric and highly involved 'blame narratives' as the predominant means of orientation of each state's foreign policy means that aggressive international behaviour and posturing, envisioning the containment or defeat of the opposing state, frequently appears as an adequate and reasonable way for each survival unit to try to acquire a greater degree of control over the social processes in which it is enmeshed at the level of world politics.<sup>598</sup> However, Elias argues, when observed from a more detached perspective, such policies can be understood as actually reinforcing the threat that people pose to each other and the tensions to which they are exposed. They lock human beings in double-bind processes of increasing mutual danger, greater involvement, and concomitant incapacity to produce a more detached understanding of their conditions of existence, on the basis of which they might better orientate as to how to achieve a greater degree of conscious and collective control over social processes; namely, by taming inter-state violent conflicts and elimination contests.<sup>599</sup>

According to Elias, the level of danger and threat that human beings organised as states continue to pose to one another means that people's perspectives and modes of orientation in world politics remain predominantly shaped by an involvement–detachment balance significantly tilted towards the former. Consequently, human beings continue to be predominantly oriented by 'obsolete modes of thought' as their we-images remain locked to survival units at lower levels of integration, such as the nation-state, which are increasingly out of synch with the global character of human interdependence.<sup>600</sup> People's more involved perspectives and more restricted we-images thus exercise a drag effect over their capacity to attain a more detached and cosmopolitan point of view which recognises that the global interconnection of the species means that the 'chances of survival [have come to] depend largely on what happens on the global plane [and that, consequently] it is the whole of humanity which now constitutes the last effective survival unit'.<sup>601</sup> As such, Elias argues that as long as the double-bind in world politics remains, and people are unable to bring under greater self-control the fears and tensions caused by the mutual threats they pose each other, a more detached perspective of social processes – which explains them by

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<sup>598</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 138ff.

<sup>599</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 149.

<sup>600</sup> Elias, N. *Humana Conditio*, p. 144.

<sup>601</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 202.

the unplanned dynamics of human interdependent competition rather than by ego-centric and highly involved blame narratives – will remain predominantly beyond their reach.<sup>602</sup>

However, Elias also observes that, given the level of destructive capacity attained by human technological development, responses to conflicts between human groups through the pacification of larger areas by war and the defeat and assimilation of competing social units in a larger monopoly of power have effectively reached the ‘end of the road’.<sup>603</sup> As such, the untying of the double-bind in world politics cannot occur through the development of further elimination contests that eventually lead to the formation of a world state. Instead, new modes of regulation of the global web of humanity have to be devised, if a ‘return to the cave’ is to be avoided.<sup>604</sup> As Elias notes, in one of his rare comment regarding what this new mode of self-regulation might entail, the web of humanity has stretched ‘too widely, and the number of states large and small that are accustomed to independence is too considerable, to give a single state or a single group of states any real chance of establishing a lasting military-economic hegemony over the whole of humanity’.<sup>605</sup> Consequently, Elias argues that, in the absence of a realistic possibility of establishing a world state, the ‘development of humanity has reached a (...) period in which human beings are confronted, for the first time, with the task of organising themselves globally – that is, as

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<sup>602</sup> Elias, N. *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 149.

<sup>603</sup> Elias, N. *Humana Conditio*, p. 126.

<sup>604</sup> Elias, N. *Humana Conditio*, p. 126. In this context, we can argue that the majority of analyses of Elias’s work interpret his conception of the monopoly mechanism and world politics as entailing the argument that elimination contests between human survival units will continue until they produce a worldwide state which then proceeds to pacify inter-state relations. Such interpretation is supported by Elias’s own statements; for example, in *On the Process of Civilisation*, he argues that we may surmise that with continuing integration even larger survival units will gradually be assembled under a stable government and internally pacified and that ‘they in turn will train their weapons outwards against human aggregates of the same size until, with a further integration, (...) they too gradually grow together and world society is pacified’. See: Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 287. However, less interpretative emphasis has been put on how Elias significantly revised his argument in light of the advent of nuclear weapons.

<sup>605</sup> Elias, N. *Humana Conditio*, p. 134. Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, working within the process sociological approach, observes that the nuclear balance between the great powers appears to fulfil the role, at the level of world politics, of a functional substitute to a global monopoly over the means of violence. The threat of annihilation on a global scale posed by nuclear war constitutes a compelling external constraint over people organised as states to exercise greater self-restraint in their foreign policy and develop a greater degree of control over their drives and impulses which, in the absence of the nuclear threat, more easily would take over their behavioural orientations and push them into armed conflict with each other. As such, van den Bergh argues that the nuclear revolution, while implying an increase in the degree of human destructive capacity, also acts as a compulsion for the development of more ‘civilised’ personality structures of the people caught up in the dynamics of mutually assured destruction. See: van Benthem van den Bergh, G. *The Nuclear Revolution and the End of the Cold War: Forced Restraint* (London, Macmillan, 1992). See also: Mennell, N. ‘The Globalisation of Human Society’, p. 367.

humanity'.<sup>606</sup> In keeping with his developmental approach, Elias observes that it is impossible to foresee whether the species will live up to such a task, or whether it will destroy itself in the preceding struggle, either as a result of large-scale nuclear conflict or some other form of collective destruction.<sup>607</sup> However, Elias considers that any chance of success depends, ultimately, on the human capacity to achieve a more adequate involvement–detachment balance in people's personality structures and a corresponding widening of their we-images to assume a more cosmopolitan character that encompasses the species as a whole as their effective survival unit. People need to assume a more detached perspective of the predominant social processes shaping human global interdependence which permits an abandonment of more involved and ego-centric blame narratives as the main means of orientation in world politics. In this context, Elias argues that the social sciences play a fundamental role in promoting more cosmopolitan means of orientation which are capable of attaining a more universal and detached perspective on the conditions of existence of globalised humanity, and that orientate human beings as to how – in the absence of a hegemonic global monopoly over the means of violence which pacifies world politics and reduces the tensions and dangers that human survival units pose to each other – they can fulfil 'the task (...) of contributing gradually to a renunciation of the traditional warlike institutions through voluntary self-limitation and (...) submission to the arbitration of humanity'.<sup>608</sup>

Our reading of Elias's engagement with world politics from the perspective of our inquiry into the problem of orientation once again confirms our argument regarding how process sociology opens the way for a more comprehensive engagement with topics already addressed by the critical authors. In particular, Elias is able to provide a more adequate understanding of the several interweaving social processes, in all dimension of the triads of

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<sup>606</sup> Elias, N. *Humana Conditio*, p. 120.

<sup>607</sup> Elias, N. *Humana Conditio*, p. 140.

<sup>608</sup> Elias, N. *Humana Conditio*, p. 145. According to Kilminster, Elias's process sociology is engaged in the production of orientating frameworks capable of operating a shift in the analytical emphasis from intra-state relations to humanity as a whole. A shift which is capable of guarding against the 'intrusion' of more involved and ego-centric national self-images in the formation of orientating frameworks in a manner that might undermine their capacity to attain a more universal perspective on the human condition which proves essential for 'understanding, and potentially aiding survival in the next phase of humankind's development at the global level'. See: Kilminster, N. *Norbert Elias: Post-philosophical sociology*, p. 144. Furthermore, Kilminster adds that such a shift to thinking about humankind as a whole might be becoming more accessible to human beings given the intensification of human global interdependence; nevertheless, it still represents a fundamental 'challenge to the sociological imagination'. See: Kilminster, N. *The Sociological Revolution: From the Enlightenment to the global age* (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 103.

controls, that shape not only the globalisation of the species but also the development of people's personality structures in the direction of more cosmopolitan perspectives and modes of attunement towards their conditions of existence. Furthermore, and on the contrary of the critical authors, Elias is capable of maintaining a constant awareness of how the growing global interdependence of the species entails the interweaving between several society-specific developmental paths and civilising processes in a manner that avoids an understanding of these phenomena on the basis of a linear and teleological model of human history. Consequently, we can argue that process sociology effectively points us in the direction of the type of approach that is required for the production of a more adequate answer to the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation, on the basis of which a means of orientation can be developed which is capable of attaining a more detached perspective on the human condition while recognising and preserving human difference, thus ensuring a better protection against the reproduction of the type of modernist grand narratives that characterise the works of the critical authors.

However, as we already noted in the previous chapter, Elias's argument regarding the lack of reliable knowledge about the long-term process of human development means that he remains adamantly committed to the production of more detached analyses of the history of the species which avoid the production of premature answers regarding how human beings might further expand their capacity for self-determination. In Elias's assessment, the detour via detachment which is required before such forms of secondary re-involvement are considered is an inter-generational effort given how human beings have not even developed the adequate language on the basis of which to study these processes and how the majority of people across the world need to first possess a deeper understanding of how their global networks of interdependence work before they stand any chance of intervening in social processes in a manner that ensures an expansion of human conscious control over them without the production of new unplanned processes which might reveal themselves a source of even more harmful effects and relations of domination, exclusion and violence between people. As such, despite Elias's argument regarding the need for a new mode of self-regulation of humankind at the level of world politics on the basis of more voluntary self-restraint, he does not provide a more in-depth engagement with the question of how, and under what conditions, this voluntary self-limitation might be achieved and how exactly human beings can devise new modes of collective steering of



their global interdependence in a manner that unties the double-bind of world politics and avoids violent conflicts between survival units. Rather, his analysis – despite some scattered excursus into the more involved implications of his model of human development which express Elias's underlying humanism and which we address in the second section of this chapter – remains firmly committed to a detached approach, focused on identifying the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping human development at the level of world politics and in addressing the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation.

In this manner, and from a critical theoretical perspective, it can be said that Elias's process sociological emphasis on detachment only takes us halfway towards the production of a more adequate answer to both dimensions of the problem of orientation. Even recognising the validity of Elias's argument regarding the lack of a more reliable fund of knowledge about human development, the current conditions of global interdependence of the species – and the series of uncontrolled social processes which affect human beings in ways that threaten both the maintenance of people's lives and livelihoods and the future maintenance of complex societies or even of the planet's biosphere – means that we are still left with the need for both the critique of more involved and parochial means of orientation and for critical reflections on how to promote more cosmopolitan perspectives and a widening of people's we-images. On the basis of which human beings can better attune to the consequences of their actions across the long webs of interdependent humanity and to the need to develop voluntary practices of self-restraint that enable them to at least ameliorate the more harmful unplanned effects of their global interdependence. Faced with immediate challenges such as environmental degradation or the continued possibility of nuclear conflict, Elias's process sociology can thus appear, from a critical perspective, over-cautious. As such, we argue that rather than fully embracing Elias's call for a detour via detachment and its generational postponement of an engagement with the anticipatory dimension of orientation, a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation requires a more active interplay between the pursuit for a more detached analysis of the long-term process of human development and the more involved assessment of its implications, at each historical juncture, for the expansion of the human powers of conscious control.<sup>609</sup> Such an approach seeks to attain a more adequate involvement–

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<sup>609</sup> The following argument reproduces and develops upon that already advanced in Saramago, A. 'Problems of Orientation and Control'.

detachment balance which recognises that while the degree of reliable knowledge about human development is still too limited to allow more definitive and positive statements about the most adequate ways of organising peoples' relations of interdependence at the global scale, at the same time, the development of more detached knowledge needs to be constantly complemented with a more involved assessment of what it reveals, for each period in history, regarding the adequacy of its predominant perspectives and modes of orientation. In particular, an assessment is required of what developmental trends appear to be leading to the further expansion of human beings' conscious control over their conditions of existence or rather hindering such expansion and people's capacity to manage their emergent level of global integration in ways that contain its unplanned and potentially harmful dynamics.

In the next section, we argue that the development of a means of orientation capable of attaining such an involvement–detachment balance which more adequately answers both dimensions of the problem of orientation can be reached through the production of a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory. A synthesis which is capable of combining, on the one hand, a critical theoretical normative commitment to the expansion of human self-determination on the basis of a non-transcendental, materialist and emergentist assessment of the historical conditions for the expansion of the human powers of conscious control with, on the other hand, a process sociological detached approach to the study of the long-term process of human development on the basis of its multi-linear and open-ended model of the species' history. This synthesis, we argue, would permit the development of a more cosmopolitan orientating framework regarding the conditions of existence of globalised humanity which captures the plurality of the human species and more adequately avoids the reproduction of modernist myths.

However, it is also necessary to note that the involvement–detachment balance to which this synthesis aspires is extremely fragile. In order to fulfil its purpose, social scientists engaged in the production of such a synthesis need to be constantly conscious of the ever lurking danger of their perspectives being overcome by forms of involvement that undermine their capacity to achieve a more detached analysis of human development. As such, the production of this synthesis is necessarily a task for a research project involving a multi-disciplinary team which is able to constantly shift between the more detached

production of orientating frameworks regarding the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping human development and the more involved assessment of their implications regarding the immanent potential at each historical juncture for the expansion of human self-determination. The social scientists engaged in this project thus need to achieve a high degree of self-control over their internal drives and impulses in order to secure the involvement–detachment balance at the level of their personality structures that enables the production of this synthesis.

## 2. Towards a synthesis

In this section, we carry out a reading of Elias's work from a critical theoretical perspective in order to highlight its more normative implications and open research pathways through which a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory can be pursued in the future.<sup>610</sup> This analysis is carried out in three subsections. First, we build our argument with reference to Linklater's work, noticing how it confirms the possibility for such a synthetic project. Second, we show how this higher synthesis is capable of overcoming some of the classic criticisms of process sociology from a critical perspective, which are here exemplified by Honneth and Joas's engagement with Elias's theory of civilising processes. And third, we argue how a critical theoretical reading of Elias's work opens the way for the recovery of a Marxian non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation which, combined with process sociology's multi-linear and open-ended explanatory model of the species' history, can constitute the basis for a theoretical framework that functions as a more adequate means of orientation regarding how human beings might better attune to their conditions of existence and more consciously regulate the global networks of their interdependence.

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<sup>610</sup> It is worth noting that within process sociology there has been a growing discussion regarding the possible normative implications of Elias's approach to the long-term process of human development. Our analysis of Elias's work from a critical perspective can be understood as a further contribution to this ongoing discussion. See: Dunne, S. 'The politics of figurational sociology', *The Sociological Review*, 71: 1 (2009) pp. 28-57; Kilminster, R. 'Critique and overcritique in sociology'; Kilminster, R. 'Norbert Elias's Post-Philosophical Sociology: From 'critique' to relative detachment' in *Norbert Elias and Figurational Research: Processual thinking in sociology*, edited by Norman Gabriel and Stephen Mennell (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 91-116; Saramago, A. 'Problems of Orientation and Control'; Linklater, A. 'Long-Term Patterns of Change in Human Interconnectedness'; Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, especially pp. 185-190.

## 2.1. Process sociology and critical theory

Linklater's reading of Elias is significant for our inquiry given how it supports our argument regarding the potential of a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory as an answer to the problem of orientation. Linklater has been engaged in a project that applies process sociology's theoretical framework to the study of world politics through the production a synthesis between Elias's work – in particular his analysis of civilising processes – Martin Wight's sociology of states-systems, and critical theory.<sup>611</sup> His argument regarding the need to carry out such a synthesis assumes predominantly the form of an explanatory critique of Elias's work that notices how Elias fails to provide a more detailed account of the role that different international societies of states have had in promoting global civilising processes. As Linklater argues, Elias 'does not examine civilising processes in different systems of states and is inclined to think that there is little in the way of processes of civilisation in international relations'.<sup>612</sup> He ignores how global civilising processes have historically been responsible for promoting, even in the absence of a global monopoly of force, the development of patterns of self-restraint in the conduct of the foreign policy of different survival units which perceive themselves as belonging to the same international society.<sup>613</sup>

However, Linklater's critique of Elias can also be read from the anticipatory perspective of the problem of orientation as implying that Elias's emphasis on a detour via detachment has moved his analysis away from a consideration of global civilising processes, which have not been the prevalent feature of human historical development, to instead focus on the more predominant social processes that have hitherto shaped world politics, such as double-bind processes, elimination contests or the monopoly mechanism. As Linklater observes, his analysis is not informed by a 'critical theoretical interest' in understanding the 'potentials for global solidarity, and in supporting a mode of scholarship that lends a voice to suffering (...) and enquires into how far potentials for creating

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<sup>611</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*.

<sup>612</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. xi.

<sup>613</sup> These global civilising processes have found expression, for example, in long-term collective learning processes about what standards of self-restraint human groups organised as states have to observe in order to reduce the levels of unnecessary harm in the context of their mutual relations of competitive interdependence. See: Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 181.

cosmopolitan harm conventions can be realized in (...) conditions of international anarchy'.<sup>614</sup>

In this context, Linklater strives to overcome the limitations he identifies in Elias's work through a higher synthesis between process sociology, English School and critical theory which is able to produce a theoretical framework on the basis of which a 'critical sociology of civilising processes in states-systems' can be developed.<sup>615</sup> According to Linklater, this approach should be capable of addressing the long-term process of human development from the perspective of how far human communities, in different contexts throughout the history of the species, 'have discovered ways in which they can promote their interests without causing violent or non-violent harm (...) and how far such achievements are connected with advances in thinking that insiders and outsiders are moral equals'.<sup>616</sup> Ultimately, Linklater's synthesis strives to develop a 'comparative sociological inquiry' at the level of world politics, which 'investigates what different international systems have contributed to a global civilising process'.<sup>617</sup>

Linklater's engagement with Elias's process sociology thus shows how it is possible to build upon Elias's work in a manner that highlights the more involved implications of his study of the long-term process of human development. By trying to develop a critical sociology of global civilising processes, Linklater is effectively striving to achieve an involvement-detachment balance in his work which, on the one hand, makes use of Elias's detached, multi-linear and open-ended model of human development to better understand the predominant dynamics and social processes shaping the history of the species and, on the other hand, combines this analysis with a more involved assessment of its meaning for future global civilising processes.

Even though Linklater does not engage with the problem of orientation directly, the contribution of his work for our current purposes is clear. It points to the possibility of building upon Elias's process sociology through a synthesis with critical theory that achieves an involvement-detachment balance that more adequately addresses both dimensions of the problem of orientation by fulfilling two main objectives. On the one hand, this synthesis would provide a more cosmopolitan perspective on the predominant dynamics and social

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<sup>614</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 257.

<sup>615</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 257.

<sup>616</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 244.

<sup>617</sup> Linklater, A. *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, p. 244.

processes shaping the long-term process of globalisation of the species, while protecting the plurality of the human condition by recognising the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development. On the other hand, it would provide a more involved understanding of the meaning of its explanatory analysis for an anticipatory assessment of the immanent historical potential that human development has gathered for the future expansion of human beings' capacity to self-determine their global conditions of existence.

## 2.2. Civilisation and self-determination

However, any proposal for a synthesis between these two approaches also has to meet the predominant criticisms of Elias's work arising from a critical theoretical perspective. These are particularly well summarised by Honneth and Joas who, in the book *'Social Action and Human Nature'*, argue that Elias's process sociology suffers from a lack of engagement with the normative implications of its own analysis of human development. Focusing in particular on Elias's *'On the Process of Civilisation'*, Honneth and Joas argue that Elias's emphasis on a detached approach, i.e. his 'pathos of freedom from valuation', leads him to 'hide' the possibility of individual self-determination in the long-term process of human development.<sup>618</sup> Analysing Elias's position regarding the development of individual 'civilised' self-control, they accuse him of simply assuming the possibility of repressing internal drives and impulses 'without consequences in the form of inhibitional energies or neurotic disorders'.<sup>619</sup> Consequently, they argue, Elias poses a linear conception of civilisation entailing the increase of 'repressive self-control', which is perceived as a 'blind automatic mechanism of behavioural constraints that are invested with fear'.<sup>620</sup> He ignores the possibility that these internal self-controls might also be the result of the 'internalisation of norms arising from the recognition of their necessity or utility, and that is flexible and accessible to the ego'.<sup>621</sup> As such, Elias's process sociology is blind to the possibility of a social order that is more 'favourably disposed' to human drives and which requires 'less self-restraint'.<sup>622</sup> Instead, it puts forward an interpretation of civilisation which supposes a linear

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<sup>618</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 129.

<sup>619</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 126.

<sup>620</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 125.

<sup>621</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 125.

<sup>622</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 127.

decrease in aggression between people, but fails to acknowledge the possibility of a social order in which 'external and ritual means of social integration' are substituted by 'discursive clarification and settling of intragroup conflict'.<sup>623</sup>

In light of the characterisation of Elias's work carried out in this and the previous chapter, Honneth and Joas's critique appears hardly convincing or fair. As we emphasised in chapter six, and unlike what is argued by Honneth and Joas, Elias does not perceive civilising processes as implying the linear growth of blind and automatic self-controls. The development of human personality structures in the direction of civilisation cannot be characterised in a quantitative manner as entailing an increase in individual self-control. Rather, a qualitative characterisation is more adequate, which refers to civilising processes as an overall development of people's personality structures in the direction of more even, all-round and uniform patterns of individual self-control over internal drives and affects which, furthermore, can assume remarkably different expressions across space and time. Such conception is not quantitative, linear or teleological nor does it entail the assumption that some human groups lack self-control when compared with others. Instead, it traces the multi-linear, open-ended and potentially reversible development of the patterns of individual self-restraint – on which human social existence depends – in connection with the development of the webs of human interdependence and human beings' relations with non-human nature.

Furthermore, in the previous chapter we also noted that the development of people's personality structures in a 'civilised' direction is concomitant with their internalisation of social standards of behaviour in the form of psychological agencies of self-control which can assume a more automatic or a more conscious character. There, we argued that the more or less conscious self-regulation of individual drives and affects is variable in accordance with several factors, such as the development of the networks of human interdependence, the asymmetries of power between human groups, and the particular place occupied by each individual in the web of humanity. Now, we can return to this argument and combine it with Elias's observations regarding the changes at the level of individual personality structures which are concomitant with the development of double-bind situations at the level of world politics and the asymmetries of power between human

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<sup>623</sup> Honneth, A. and Joas, H. *Social Action and Human Nature*, p. 127.

groups which are verified in their context. This analysis permits us to recover important Kantian and Habermasian themes on the basis of Elias's multi-linear and open-ended model of human development and shows how it is possible to read critical concerns in Elias's work regarding both the costs of civilisation and the historical development of human beings' capacity for self-determination vis-à-vis their internal drives and inclinations.<sup>624</sup>

As Elias notes throughout his work, the internalisation of social standards of behavioural expectation frequently comes at a high cost for individual self-expression and satisfaction, imposing forms of self-restraint which might not be fundamental for human social existence but rather perpetuate power asymmetries between human groups.<sup>625</sup> For example, at the conclusion of *'On the Process of Civilisation'*, Elias argues that the current expression of civilisation in Western European countries can hardly be considered a 'pinnacle' of 'civilised' conduct, as it is frequently characterized by those countries we-images.<sup>626</sup> Self-described 'civilised' people are rigged through in their personality structures by all manners of 'anxieties' and 'tensions' – many times manifesting themselves in the form of neuroses and other psychological disorders – which derive from their internalisation of external constraints in the form of automatic self-controls throughout their individual processes of education and socialisation.<sup>627</sup> As Elias observes, these 'rules of conduct and sentiment' frequently constitute expressions of the power struggles and tensions between human groups enmeshed in unplanned and uncontrolled relations of competitive interdependence at both the state and inter-state levels.<sup>628</sup> These unplanned social

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<sup>624</sup> The following argument derives from our own analysis of Elias's work combined with our reading of Cas Wouters's studies on 'informalisation'. In referring to Western Europe, Wouters observes that, since the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, growing levels of social interdependence and diminishing asymmetries of power between people have been concomitant with a change in the moulding of individual personality structures. If earlier phases of the civilising process were characterised by a 'second nature' personality in the form of automatic repressive agencies of internal control, the more recent phase appears to be characterised by the development of a 'third nature' personality, in which human beings have a greater capacity to more consciously self-control their internal drives and impulses and carry out a 'controlled decontrolling' of their behavioural manifestation. In this context, Wouters refers to a growing 'constraint to be unconstrained', as people's social relations become characterized by a higher degree of 'informalisation'. See: Wouters, C. 'How civilising processes continued: towards an informalisation of manners and third nature personality' in *Norbert Elias and Figurational Research: Processual thinking in Sociology*, edited by Norman Gabriel and Stephen Mennell (Malden, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 140-159; Wouters, C. *Informalisation: Manners and Emotions since 1890* (London, Sage, 2007). For more on Elias's notion of 'controlled decontrolling' see: Elias, N. and Dunning, E. *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process* [Collected Works, vol. 7] (Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2008).

<sup>625</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 488.

<sup>626</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 488.

<sup>627</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 487.

<sup>628</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 489.



dynamics push people into patterns of asymmetric competition for power and status and into double-bind situations to which their personality structures have to correspond through the individual internalisation of external constraints that guarantee 'conformity' with their group's standards of 'acceptable' social behaviour, which 'have no other function than that of reinforcing their [group's] power chances and status superiority'.<sup>629</sup> According to Elias, while individual self-control is a condition for group survival and human social existence, this automatic internalisation of external constraints can assume the form of highly repressive internal agencies of self-restraint, which cause exactly the type of inhibitional and neurotic consequences to which Honneth and Joas refer.<sup>630</sup>

In this context, we can make use of one of Elias's rare statements expressing a more normatively committed perspective to highlighting a fundamental critical concern with human self-determination in his work. At the end of *'On the Process of Civilisation'*, Elias argues that it might be possible for human beings to acquire a greater degree of conscious control over the future development of civilising processes and the patterns of internal regulation of their personality structures in a manner that reduces the personal costs of civilisation and enables people's self-restraint to be confined to 'those instructions and prohibitions which are necessary in order to keep up a high level of functional differentiation and interdependence, without which even the present levels of civilised conduct in people's co-existence with each other could not be maintained'.<sup>631</sup> Such future and more self-determined pattern of 'civilised' self-restraint, however, can only be achieved when the unplanned dynamics of human interdependence have been brought under greater collective and conscious control by lowering the asymmetries of power between human groups and the tensions and fears associated with them. As Elias argues, only when the tensions between and within states have been 'mastered' can the common pattern of individual self-control become more conscious and 'be confined to those restraints that are necessary in order that [people] can live with each other and with themselves with a high chance of enjoyment and a low change of fear'.<sup>632</sup> Then, it can become the rule that 'an individual person can attain the optimal balance between his or her imperative drives

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<sup>629</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 488.

<sup>630</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 488.

<sup>631</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 489.

<sup>632</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 489.

claiming satisfaction and fulfilment and the constraints imposed upon them'.<sup>633</sup> A condition which, Elias notes, can be variously described as one of greater 'happiness' or 'freedom'.<sup>634</sup>

Elias's theory of civilising processes can thus be read from a critical theoretical perspective which highlights the possibility of tilting the balance between more automatic and more conscious patterns of self-restraint in a manner which ensures an expansion of people's capacity for self-determination vis-à-vis internal human nature. In this manner, Elias can be understood as recovering, on the basis of his process sociological model of human history, some of the main critical concerns of Kant and Habermas regarding under what conditions human beings might attain a greater degree of conscious control over their more animalic inclinations and more consciously regulate their behaviour in a manner that is more individualised and self-determined rather than simply reproducing the behavioural expectations of their particular societies. However, Elias can also be argued to provide a more comprehensive assessment of these topics than the critical authors by noticing the connection between people's development of more conscious control over their internal patterns of self-restraint and the development of the networks of human interdependence and the powers asymmetries that structure them. In particular, Elias's observations regarding how the permanence of a double-bind situation in world politics reinforces people's internalisation of social constraints in the form of more automatic self-restraints as part of their groups' survival strategies highlights that the development of more self-determined personality structures is an emergent feature of the species' history which only manifests itself under particular social conditions. More specifically, it requires a lowering of power asymmetries and tensions between human groups and the untying of the double-bind at the level of world politics. Otherwise, people's personality structures tend to remain predominantly structured by more automatic forms of self-restraint which interiorise the social expectations of their societies and lock their perspective and world-views to those of their particularistic and self-regarding political communities, blocking their capacity to attain a more detached perspective of social relations on the basis of which they might better attune to the reality of their global interdependence.

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<sup>633</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 489.

<sup>634</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 489.

### 2.3. Controlling control

Our critical reading of Elias's work – which permits to identify a critical concern with human self-determination that understands it as an emergent feature of the species' history – can also be further developed to argue that Elias's materialist and emergentist approach is capable of not only producing a multi-linear and open-ended model of human development, but can also be built upon in order to recover Marx's non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation.

As we saw in chapter three, unlike Kant and Habermas, Marx does not seek to ascertain the transcendental and ideal conditions of freedom as a normative standpoint which orientates human beings as to how they might exercise greater self-determination over the course of their historical development. Instead, Marx addresses the anticipatory dimension of the problem of orientation by constantly maintaining a processual and historically-embedded perspective which conceives of the emergence of human beings' capacity to exercise conscious control over their conditions of existence as an inherent aspect of the long-term history of the species, without which the specific human mode of life would not be possible. Such perspective serves as Marx's normative standpoint of orientation, from which he develops a form of immanent critique that seeks to identify, at each particular historical juncture, the immanent potential that has been gathered for an expansion of human beings' powers of control and how these can be exercised in a more conscious manner. As we argued in chapter three, even though Marx himself ultimately fails to actualise the potential of his critical approach, still, his engagement with the anticipatory dimension of orientation is more adequate than Kant or Habermas's and is able to avoid the dualism between history and morality which is found in their works.

Our argument in the present context is that Elias's materialist and emergentist approach opens the way for a recovery of Marx's non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation, but on the basis of a multi-linear and open-ended model of human development which avoids a reproduction of Marx's linear and teleological theory of history and the modernist forms of theorising associated with it. This is particularly evidenced not only by Elias's comments at the end of *'On the Process of Civilisation'* mentioned above, but also in his analysis in books such as *'Symbol Theory'* and *'Society of Individuals'*, with reference to which we can argue that his conception of the long-term

history of the species – in the context of which he identifies humankind emerging out of the evolutionary process on Earth and developing a unique capacity to expand its conscious control over not only its conditions of existence but also those of all other beings on the planet – carries with it inherent normative implications.

For example, Elias refers to the ‘responsibility’ for other species which emerges from human control over non-human nature in a manner that recalls what in chapter three we characterised as the more environmental orientation of Marx’s work.<sup>635</sup> According to Elias, this responsibility implies that human beings need to develop a greater degree of understanding of both the planned and unplanned consequences – to other species and the Earth’s environment – arising from their control over the non-human part of the universe in order to understand what patterns of self-restraint they need to observe so as to reduce its harmful consequences.<sup>636</sup> Essentially, Elias’s process sociology can be understood as opening the way for a recovery of Marx’s claim about human beings needing to learn how *to more consciously control their own capacity for control*, in order to live up to the responsibility which arises from their preponderant position on Earth as the main threat to the continued process of evolution on the planet.<sup>637</sup>

Furthermore, Elias also notes that the human capacity for control implies a particular form of responsibility of human beings towards themselves. As the only known species on the planet capable of informed and planned co-operation, humans are in a single position in the process of evolution to take into their own hands the task of making their collective life on Earth more pleasant, meaningful and enjoyable than it has been so far.<sup>638</sup> This implies using their unique capacity for learning in order to develop a better understanding of themselves, their historical process of development and how they might come to exercise

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<sup>635</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 124.

<sup>636</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 124.

<sup>637</sup> In this context, Quilley observes that human beings, as the species with the greatest capacity for ‘destabilising impact’ on non-human nature, are also the only ones with the capacity of exercising the ‘evolutionary self-restraint’ that might enable them to avoid the more harmful and unplanned environmental consequences of their actions. However, Quilley argues that the possibility of the ‘reflexive evolution’ of the species depends on people’s capacity to produce more detached and reliable knowledge of social processes, on the basis of which they might carry out the ‘interventions and remodelling of human social and economic dynamics implied by the notion of sustainable development’. Furthermore, Quilley notes that such ‘biophilic civilising process’ remains ‘unlikely’ without the further development of human figurations in the direction of the pacification of world politics, of the internationalisation of psychological restraints against violence, and of the overall diminution of the tensions, fears and power asymmetries between people. See: Quilley, S. ‘Ecology, ‘human nature’ and civilising processes’, p. 52ff.

<sup>638</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 173.

greater collective and conscious control over it, in a manner that better avoids both its unplanned harmful consequences and the emergence of relations of domination, violence and humiliation between people. As Elias observes, human beings already know that they 'are able to live in a more civilised manner with each other'.<sup>639</sup> However, they do not know yet how to bring it about, how to curb or eliminate violence, in all its forms, from human relations. An analysis of the long-term process of human development appears to indicate that part of the answer lies in 'achieving a better balance between self-restraint and self-fulfilment, but a stable order that warrants such a balance still eludes [them]'.<sup>640</sup> As Elias notes, no one can fulfil such a task for human beings, they must do that for themselves.<sup>641</sup>

By providing a more adequate answer to the explanatory dimension of the problem of orientation, Elias's process sociological study of human development can constitute a theoretical basis for a more involved consideration of the conditions under which such a social order could be achieved. It can be built upon from a more critical perspective to address the anticipatory dimension of orientation in a manner which identifies the historical trends that either support or block the attainment of a more adequate balance between people's self-restraint and self-fulfilment, and a more conscious control of their preponderant position amongst the Earthly species which is compatible with the responsibility that accompanies it.

For example, Elias's analysis of the predominant social processes shaping the global integration of the species can be used to identify the immanent historical potential that has been gathered at the level of world politics for the development, at the level of people's personality structures, of more detached perspectives on the basis of which human beings can better attune to the long networks of interdependent humanity and come to more adequately find a balance between the self-fulfilment of their drives and impulses – as well as the interests and goals of their particular communities – and the self-restraint they need to observe in their relations with other people. Essential in this process is a widening of people's we-images to encompass larger groups of human beings and which are ultimately oriented to include the whole web of interdependent humankind as the ultimate survival unit. In this context, Elias observes that 'there are already unambiguous signs that people

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<sup>639</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 174.

<sup>640</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 174.

<sup>641</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 174.

are beginning to identify with something beyond state borders, that their we-group identity is moving towards the plane of humanity'.<sup>642</sup>

One of the main signs identified by Elias is the growing importance of the concept of human rights which, Elias argues, is starting to impose upon states an awareness regarding the need to observe certain self-restraints in their treatment of individual citizens. Elias observes that the effect that human rights can have in cultivating self-restraint in the behaviour of people organised as states vis-à-vis individual human beings resembles the type of changes that the historical formation of states led to occur at the level of familial or tribal relations with individual subjects.<sup>643</sup> The formation of states enabled individuals to release themselves from the bonds and the arbitrary power of the tribe and the family, and led these social units to observe greater self-restraint in their behaviour towards individuals. With the loosening of the more restricted bonds of the family and the tribe, human beings developed more detached and less parochial perspectives of themselves and the world, on the basis of which their internal patterns of self-restraint became more consciously regulated, individualised and 'civilised', in keeping with their integration in wider and more multi-layered networks of social interdependence to which corresponded a widening of their we-images to encompass the state as their main survival unit. Similarly, the global integration of the species can entail a global civilising process in the context of which there occurs a widening of people's we-images and the development of more detached and cosmopolitan perspectives which underline the need to observe new and more self-determined patterns of self-restraint in keeping with the awareness of the consequences of their actions across larger networks of interdependent human beings; namely, people might come to develop a greater awareness that the 'freedom from the use and threat of violence, (...) [even if] contrary to the opposing tendencies of states, will have to be asserted for the individual in the name of humanity'.<sup>644</sup>

However, Elias's explanatory model of human development also leads us to observe that the actualisation of these historical potentials is also blocked by the maintenance of the

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<sup>642</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 207.

<sup>643</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 207.

<sup>644</sup> Elias, N. *The Society of Individuals*, p. 207. According to Linklater, the development of the human rights regime and criminal law point to a 'changing balance of power between the state and the individual' and to the slow emergence of a global civilising process at the level of international society directed to taming the arbitrary power of sovereign states and cultivating forms of self-restraint in states' behaviour that accompany the growth of strategic interdependence between survival units and the increase in the destructive potential of war. See: Linklater, A. *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States System*, Chapter 10.

double-bind situation at the level of world politics. The mutual threats and fears that human beings continue to pose one another reinforce more involved and parochial perspectives and patterns of self-restraint which are increasingly less adequate to the reality of human interconnection. As such, people's basic modes of attunement towards each other fail to secure the type of more cosmopolitan orientations which are required for a better assessment of how to more consciously self-control their own behaviour in a manner that reduces the dangers and the lethality of inter-societal relations and which ensures a greater degree of collective and conscious control over the networks of interdependent humanity. Furthermore, Elias's analysis of civilising processes also leads us to argue that the possibility of a global civilising process which enables people to attune more universally towards their social relations and develop forms of mutual identification which encompass larger groups of human beings in their we-images also depends on the reduction of power asymmetries between human groups. As long as great asymmetries of power continue to be verified between different parts of humankind, the double-bind at the level of world politics cannot be untied, and human beings' basic modes of orientation remain locked to the more involved, ethnocentric and parochial points of view and interests of their particularistic and self-regarding communities.

In this context, we can argue that, from the perspective of a higher synthesis between critical theory and process sociology, which recovers Marx's non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation, the normative commitment to the expansion of human self-determination involves a historically-embedded critique of social processes which block the development of more detached perspectives at the level of people's personality structures and a widening of their we-images. This entails the assumption of a political stance against, for example, state behaviour that reinforces the double-bind in world politics and the increase of power asymmetries between different parts of humankind or the perpetuation, in public and political discourse, of blame narratives and other means of orientation towards the conditions of existence of globalised humanity that reinforce more parochial and ethnocentric modes of attunement between people.

Furthermore, this normative commitment also involves a historically-embedded support for those social processes and political practices that have historically emerged with the development of international society and that appear to hold the immanent potential

for the widening of people's we-images and the development of more detached modes of attunement that might underline patterns of self-restraint in people's behaviour which are more in line with the reality of the species' global interdependence. This entails, for example, a political commitment to the further development of historical innovations at the level of international society which might reinforce a greater self-restraint of state behaviour and thus contribute to untie the double-bind between human survival units; as is the case of innovations in the human rights regime that strive to universalise its character as representative of a truly species-wide consensus on the modes of self-restraint that human beings should observe vis-à-vis one another. In this context, we can also refer to Linklater's observations regarding emerging conceptions and proposals for world, cosmopolitan or ecological citizenship and how these can constitute historical innovations that deal with the 'disjuncture' between more involved attachments to nation-states and the 'need for effective worldwide steering mechanisms in the current phase of global social and economic integration'.<sup>645</sup> According to Linklater, proposals for world citizenship are important means of attuning people to the realities of their global interdependence and constitute a significant attempt at developing a 'global ethic of responsibility' that addresses the 'political issues that have emerged with the lengthening and thickening of the webs of mutual dependence'.<sup>646</sup>

Moreover, this normative commitment is not limited to the 'political' dimension of human existence. It also extends to other areas of human activity, such as the capitalist global networks of production, trade and consumption. In this context, we can once again refer to Elias's analysis of the monopoly mechanism to observe that the formation of transnational capitalist economic monopolies represents an early phase of development of the monopoly mechanism at the level of human global economic relations. Predominantly, these monopolies assume a private character, with the power chances of control of decision-making in their central institutions still being reduced to small managerial elites who operate them in their own benefit.<sup>647</sup> The power asymmetries between the strata of corporate managers and that of the workers who integrate and maintain these global networks of capitalist production are still very high. However, in keeping with the

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<sup>645</sup> Linklater, A. *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States System*, Chapter 11. See also: Dobson, A. *Citizenship and the Environment* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>646</sup> Linklater, A. *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States System*, Chapter 11.

<sup>647</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 481.



development of the monopoly mechanism, it can also be argued that, as the networks of human economic interdependence, of which these corporations represent the ruling centres, become more complex and lengthier, the capacity of the managerial elites to keep all the power chances of control to themselves might also become progressively smaller.<sup>648</sup> Hence, a tendency can emerge for a greater distribution of power chances amongst the workers to influence decision-making at the level of the central economic monopoly institutions.<sup>649</sup> In referring to the potential future development of economic monopolies, Elias observes that there might yet emerge a tendency for 'the unorganised ownership of monopolies to be reduced and abolished; [and for a] change in human relationships in which control of opportunities gradually ceases to be the hereditary and private preserve of an established upper stratum and becomes a function under social and public control'.<sup>650</sup> However, whether or not this 'curtailing' of the possibility of private control over economic monopolies becomes an actual possibility depends on the overall development of the global interdependence of the species and, in particular, of the interplay between social processes such as the direction of development of inter-state competitive interdependence and of human technological control over non-human nature.<sup>651</sup>

Following these brief observations regarding how an engagement with the anticipatory dimension of orientation might look like from the perspective of a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory, it is important to also note that any such engagement can only be very tentative and that it needs to be always coupled with the constant awareness that the fund of knowledge about human development is still insufficient to advance more comprehensive and positive arguments regarding the

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<sup>648</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 481.

<sup>649</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 481.

<sup>650</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 489. It is also important to refer to Reihard Blomert's argument regarding the apparent 'pendulum movement' that characterises the historical development of human economic activity under capitalism and is defined by phases of strong state regulation of capitalist markets, followed by periods of intense deregulation. In particular, Blomert considers that the main future dynamic shaping the development and potential socialisation of economic monopoly centres lies in the capacity of political institutions, both at the state and supranational levels, to 'tame' the 'financial aristocracies' which formed during the latest phase of deregulation of economic activity. See: Blomert, R. 'The Taming of Economic Aristocracies', *Human Figurations: Long-term perspectives on the human condition*, 1: 2 (2012).

<sup>651</sup> Elias, N. *On the Process of Civilisation*, p. 481. As Mennell argues, the latest phase of development of global capitalism might actually express trends opposing functional democratisation and the expansion to wider social strata of control chances over economic monopoly centres. As such, the immediate future of the global integration of the species might actually express 'functional de-democratisation' and a consolidation of power asymmetries between people. See: Mennell, S. 'What economists forgot (and what Wall Street and the City never learned): A sociological perspective on the crisis in economics', *History of the Human Sciences*, 27: 3 (2014) pp. 20-37.

immanent potentials for the self-determination of the species and how to actualise them. In order to avoid the reproduction of modernist myths such as those that affect the works of the critical authors, the assessment of the immanent potential for human self-determination needs to be constantly accompanied by, and carried out on the basis of, more detached analyses of the several society-specific paths of human development that are interweaving at the global scale. This implies the need for more detailed analyses of different civilising processes outside Western Europe than those that are available at the moment, as well as a more in-depth understanding of how these several civilising processes have come to influence each other throughout the long-term process of globalisation of the species. As such, we can argue that, at the current historical juncture, the assessment of the immanent potentials for human self-determination must be focused on the level of analysis of international society and on the identification of the resources its historical development has gathered for the further widening of people's we-images and the development of more 'civilised' standards of self-regulation in people's behaviour, both individually and when organised as states. The analytical focus on international society arises from the fact that its historical development is itself expressive of the interweaving of various civilising processes and of deliberative processes between them envisioning the definition of the patterns of self-restraint that human beings should observe in their mutual relations at the various levels of human interdependence. As such, only through this analytical focus is it possible to guarantee that the anticipatory assessment of the immanent potential for the expansion of human self-determination is carried out on the basis of an involvement–detachment balance which, simultaneously, strives for a more cosmopolitan perspective that avoids a projection of particularistic points of view as universal, and maintains a more involved normative commitment to a historically-embedded immanent critique of the conditions of human existence and their potential for the expansion of the human powers of control.

Our critical engagement with Elias's work thus shows that by developing a materialist and emergentist approach to the study of the long-term process of human development, Elias's process sociology can also be understood as laying the theoretical foundations for a recovery of Marx's non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation. It shows how it is possible to build upon Elias's work and produce a higher synthesis with critical theory which does not require a transcendental and fixed standpoint of normative orientation that derives from an *a priori* commitment to the

universal conditions of freedom, as is the case in Kant and Habermas's critical approaches. Instead, from the perspective of this higher synthesis, a more adequate standpoint of normative orientation is one which is non-transcendental, processual and historically-embedded, to the extent that it arises from the analysis of the long-term process of human development and the identification it permits of the emergent characteristics of the human stage of evolution. This analysis identifies the human capacity for control not only as a possibility opened up by the evolutionary process, but as constituting an unavoidable aspect of human existence. Consequently, the question that comes to be inevitably posed from the perspective of a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory is not whether control should or not be exercised, but whether it is possible to exercise it in a more conscious manner, which avoids its unplanned harmful consequences and enables human beings to make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing, while recognising that this means different things to different people in different periods and areas of the development of their societies, of their personality structures and of the networks of human global interdependence.

The answer to this question involves an arduous and potentially inter-generational effort focused both on the development of more detached analyses of different civilising processes and their progressive interweaving throughout the history of the species and on the more involved assessment of the constantly changing historical potentials and limits to human self-determination. However, as Elias notes, if human beings avoid extinction at either their own hands or as a consequence of a natural phenomenon, such as a cosmic collision, 'it is unlikely that they will find, in the few million years left to them, anything better to do than to search for just that, for the production of better conditions of life on Earth, for themselves and for all those they have chosen as companions on this way'.<sup>652</sup>

## Conclusion

Our argument in this chapter has followed three main steps. First, we have addressed Elias's process sociological approach to the study world politics and shown how it provides a set of theoretical resources on the basis of which a more adequate answer to the explanatory

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<sup>652</sup> Elias, N. *The Symbol Theory*, p. 174.

dimension of the problem of orientation can be developed. In particular, we demonstrated how it enables the production of a grand narrative that captures the main dynamics and social processes shaping the long-term globalisation of the human species, while maintaining a fundamental awareness of the multi-linear, open-ended and potentially reversible character of human historical development.

Second, we also made an argument regarding the limitations of Elias's detour via detachment as an answer to the problem of orientation. We noted how Elias's emphasis on detachment leads him to constantly postpone a secondary re-involvement that assesses the normative implications of his study of the long-term process of human development. As such, process sociology remains incapable of providing a more adequate answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation, which addresses how human beings might come to exercise a greater degree of collective and conscious control over their conditions of existence. This observation led us to argue that a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory is necessary in order to produce a more adequate engagement with both dimensions of the problem of orientation. Such a synthesis would produce a means of orientation capable of providing an explanatory model of the long-term history of the species and an anticipatory assessment of how human beings might make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing.

This argument led us, third, to carry out a critical theoretical reading of Elias's work, with the purpose of identifying some critical themes in process sociology that can be used to build theoretical bridges with critical theory on the basis of which this higher synthesis might be achieved in future studies. In particular, we argued that it is possible to address Elias's work from a critical perspective which identifies the normative implications of his study of human development in a manner that recovers important Kantian, Marxian and Habermasian themes in the context of Elias's detached, multi-linear and open-ended conception of human development. The arguments advanced in this section were highly provisional and preliminary, but hopefully open the way for a future higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory which provides a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation.

## **Conclusion**

This study has carried out an inquiry regarding how the discipline of International Relations, and in particular critical international theory, can more adequately address the implications of human global interdependence and provide theoretical frameworks that function as means of orientation by helping people better find their bearings when seeking to understand themselves, their conditions of existence, and how they might come to exercise a greater degree of collective and conscious control over their future development. This inquiry was carried out through an engagement with the classical texts of the critical authors Kant, Marx and Habermas and the process sociologist Elias, which sought to address two main research questions. On the one hand, we considered the role of grand narratives in the development of more adequate answers to the problem of orientation posed by the global integration of the species. On the other hand, we asked about the possibility of recovering grand narratives as a means of orientation which seeks to attain a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition and overcome more parochial and ethnocentric points of view which legitimize society and time bound asymmetric relations of power, and their associated practices of domination and exclusion, between different parts of humankind. By reading our chosen authors through the lenses of the problem of orientation, we produced a novel interpretation of their classical texts and provided a ground-clearing exercise on the basis of which a better understanding can be developed of how critical international theory can more adequately answer the problem of orientation that is posed by the global web of interdependent humanity.

As we argued throughout our inquiry, the need for orientation has been at the centre of the collective challenges that the human species has faced throughout its long-term history on the planet. The fact that the balance between genetically determined and learning oriented behaviour has tilted significantly towards the latter throughout the process of humanization, means that human beings have a fundamental and universal need to learn, from a very early age, standards of behaviour and judgement from the societies in which they grow in order to orientate themselves in the world. The contemporary and unprecedented levels of global interdependence of the species, and the challenges that emerge from the largely unplanned process of human development and that threaten the future maintenance of complex human societies or even of the planet's biosphere – such as

those posed by environmental change and the possibility of nuclear conflict – make society and time bound perspectives on the human condition appear increasingly less adequate as frameworks of orientation. Expressive of the drag effects of loyalties to older survival units, these more involved and parochial modes of attunement – which find their most radical expression in nationalist reactions to the globalisation of human interdependence and the phenomena that accompany it, such as the mass movement of migrant populations – represent modern forms of myth; incantations that fulfil the role of emotionally comforting narratives in the context of social processes that, for their complexity and global character, appear to be spiralling out of control to the human beings integrated in them. By preventing human groups from attaining a more comprehensive and species-encompassing perspective on their conditions of existence, and of how their particular actions are necessarily enmeshed in wider interconnected networks whose interweaving produces unintended consequences that drag people into patterns of interaction and interdependence which they cannot fully understand nor control, these modes of orientation actually fulfil a disorientating function that frequently reinforces the double-binds in which people find themselves and the unplanned and threatening character of their social relations. Increasingly then, the need becomes apparent for the development of orientating frameworks that are better attuned to the global interdependence of humankind, that strive to address the human condition from the perspective of the species as a whole, and which are not limited by points of view bound to particular social groups, societies, or time periods. Only more cosmopolitan perspectives can serve as adequate means of orientation, on the basis of which human beings might more consciously understand themselves, their history and navigate their collective future on the planet.

The problem of orientation, as it is posed under conditions of human global interdependence, arises from the combination of the need to develop more cosmopolitan perspectives coupled with the recognition of the difficulty of doing just that. It implies the challenge of maintaining a constant tension between, on the one hand, striving for a more cosmopolitan point of view and, on the other hand, the observance that all perspectives are themselves part of the historical process of human development. As such, the main danger implied in the problem of orientation is that of falling into the belief that a particular perspective is truly universal. This would imply transforming it into a form of myth, through the lenses of which the whole history of the species, and its contemporary conditions of

existence, are interpreted in a manner that frequently legitimizes the assumptions and relations of power, domination and exclusion which are associated with the time period and the cultural context in which that particular perspective is developed, and that become hidden under the cover of its supposed cosmopolitanism. Such a danger is clearly expressed in modernist eighteenth and nineteenth century grand narratives and the manner in which these legitimized practices of exclusion and domination connected with Western imperialism and colonialism. The problem of orientation thus raises the question of how exactly we can prevent against the reproduction of such myths, while still attempting to produce theoretical frameworks that enable a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition.

As seen in the first chapter of this study, the ever-lurking danger of falling into new forms of myth has led much of contemporary critical international theory to carry out a retreat into the present and to concentrate its analysis on contemporary topics, without framing them in a wider conception of the historical development of the species. However, this 'presentism' – characterized by a focus on a multiplicity of particular narratives in the hope that, through the recognition of their diversity, it is possible to avoid the dangers of grand narratives – does not offer an adequate solution to the problem of orientation. Instead, it blocks the capacity to achieve a more cosmopolitan perspective, which detaches itself from particularistic society and time bound points of view and that can serve as a more adequate means of orientation in a period of human history characterized by high levels of global interweaving. As such, the contemporary focus of critical international theory rather than a solution to the problem of orientation was identified as posing the condition for higher levels of disorientation.

Alternatively, the present study has argued that a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation consists in embracing the tension and the danger inherent in it. It consists in striving to combine the more focused analyses of contemporary critical international theory with the production of theoretical frameworks that aspire to provide a more detached and cosmopolitan perspective, while being aware and preventing against the danger of becoming themselves new forms of myth. In this context, a case has been made regarding the role of grand narratives. It has been argued that very long-term accounts of the process of development of the human species – which perceive themselves as part of that process – provide the most adequate theoretical framework on the basis of

which the tension inherent in the problem of orientation can be maintained. On the one hand, by framing the contemporary conditions of human existence in the long-term process of human development, they are better able to step back from existent society and time bound particularistic perspectives, and thus help achieve a more detached point of view. On the other hand, by understanding themselves as part of that process, they might also be capable of guarding against the assumption that they represent a true and final universal standpoint. The question has thus been posed as to what extent it is possible to recover grand narratives, while preventing the reproduction of their modernist shortcomings, in critical international theory in order to reinforce its role as a means of orientation to human beings by helping them better understand and control their conditions of globally interdependent existence.

In order to answer this question, this study has analysed the manner in which the grand narratives of the critical authors Kant, Marx and Habermas, and the process sociologist Elias, can be read as providing different answers to the problem of orientation. Framed by the thematic relation established between 'orientation', 'cosmopolitanism', 'grand narratives', 'involvement-detachment balance' and 'triad of controls', we have strived to understand the extent to which the main insights, as well as the main shortcomings, of these authors' works can provide us with important clues regarding how a recovery of grand narratives can occur in critical international theory which provides a more adequate approach to both the explanatory and the anticipatory dimensions of the problem of orientation.

In this context, we used the image of an inter-generational dialogue between these authors in order to highlight how each of them has developed his own approach on the basis of the work left behind by those who preceded him, and strove to reach a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition than his predecessors. As such, we followed Kant's attempt at developing a universal history from a cosmopolitan perspective while also noting how his transcendental ascertainment of the conditions of human freedom, and his interpretation of human development through a dualism between history and morality, leads him to a linear and teleological model of the species' history. Such transcendental, linear and teleological answer to the problem of orientation is ultimately found inadequate and to reproduce a form of modernist myth which, under the assumption that it expresses a truly universal perspective, advances a Western-centric understanding of



the long-term process of human development which legitimizes practices of domination and exclusion between different parts of humanity. Then, we observed how Marx's materialist and emergentist approach enables him to overcome Kant's dualisms and provides a non-transcendental engagement with the problem of orientation that holds the potential to capture the multi-linear and open-ended character of human development. However, Marx fails in actualizing this potential and also falls in the trap of modernist theorising through a one-sided emphasis on human control over nature and relations of production. Marx's attribution of causal primacy to only one of the three dimensions of the triad of basic controls ultimately leads him to a linear and teleological conception of human development which, coupled with a dismissal of the role of social processes such as the development of social norms, state formation and world politics in the history of the species, implies a failure to theoretical capture the fundamental condition of plurality of humankind.

We then followed Habermas's attempt to build upon the work of Kant and Marx through a reconstruction of Marx's critical approach that strives to overcome his shortcomings by recovering Kantian themes in the context of a theory of social evolution which relies on a theoretical distinction between the logic and the dynamics of human development. Habermas's work is particularly instructive for our purposes to the extent that he is distinguishable from other thinkers in the critical tradition as one of the only post-war theorists that maintains a commitment to the production of grand narratives on the human condition and keeps faith with the idea of a universal history from a cosmopolitan perspective that might provide orientation to human beings caught up in global networks of interdependence regarding how they might better understand and control them. As we observed, Habermas's critical approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the interplay of the triad of controls in human development, and recovers an analysis of the importance of linguistic communication, the state and inter-societal relations in the history of the species. However, Habermas's theoretical division between the logic and the dynamics of human development also leads him to fall again in a trap similar to Kant's, and to not only pose a conception of human development which is linear and teleological, but also recover a form of transcendental engagement with the anticipatory dimension of orientation which reinstates a dualism between morality and history and implies a set of modernist assumptions regarding the human condition and its historical development.

Consequently, all three critical authors were found to produce grand narratives which are inadequate as an answer to the problem of orientation. By re-reading the shortcomings of their works in light of Elias's notion of the involvement–detachment balance, we argued that their focus on the normative goal of orientating political agency towards human emancipation led them to remain locked in the particularistic perspectives of their own societies and time periods, and thus to reproduce modernist forms of theorising which interpret the whole course of human history from the perspective of their more involved, society and time bound, wishes, fears and concerns, and which not only undermined the function of their grand narratives as a means of orientation regarding the history and globalisation of the species, but also hid from their view the forms of domination and exclusion that are inherent in their own theoretical and historical positions. However, our analysis of the critical authors' works also led us to a clearer understanding of the conditions that a more adequate means of orientation would have to fulfil. Two main conditions were identified in this context. First, it would have to recover and further develop Marx's non-transcendental engagement with the anticipatory dimension of orientation. And second, it would have to answer the explanatory dimension of orientation through a multi-linear and open-ended model of human development which recognises the diversity of humankind and captures the role of the developmental interplay between all three dimensions of the human powers of control in the history of the species. Such a theoretical framework, we argued, would constitute a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation, capable of attaining an involvement–detachment balance which simultaneously captures the main dynamics and social processes shaping human historical development and helps human beings better understand how they might collectively and more consciously regulate the globe spanning webs of interdependent humankind.

In the last two chapters of this study we advanced the argument that this theoretical framework can be found through a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory, and we tried to provide the initial theoretical steps through which this synthesis might be accomplished in critical international theory. We started by reading Elias's process sociology as an answer to the problem of orientation. In this context, we argued that Elias can be characterised as being in the same intellectual trajectory as the critical authors, sharing their awareness of the role that social processes such as symbolic communication, the development of social norms or inter-state relations have in shaping the long-term

development of the species and that of the human powers of control. Furthermore, we also observed that, like the critical authors, Elias is engaged in the search for a more cosmopolitan perspective on the human condition on the basis of which new human self-images might be developed that promote a universalisation of people's perspectives and the constitution of new modes of orientation that are better attuned to the conditions of existence of the global web of humanity. Following our analysis of Elias's work, a case was made that his detour via detachment – by postponing an engagement with the normative implications of the long-term process of human development and their associated questions of political agency – enables the process sociologist to step back from his own society and time bound point of view to a greater extent than the critical authors, and to develop an approach to the production of grand narratives which is more adequate as an explanatory means of orientation. This approach consists in abandoning the narrative form of analysis of the long-term process of human development to instead provide a materialist and emergentist approach that captures what Elias describes as universal social processes of human development, which are common to all human societies and inescapable features of human existence. At the same time that he identifies these universal social processes, he traces their developmental dynamics and how these affect their development in different directions and in society-specific ways throughout the history of the species, thus capturing the multi-linear, open-ended and potentially regressive character of the long-term process of human development and the way it is constituted by the interweaving of society-specific developmental processes. Expressing these universal social processes and their developmental dynamics through concepts such as symbol emancipation, civilising processes, the monopoly mechanism, functional democratization, double-bind processes, changes in we-images, the we-I balance or the involvement-detachment balance, Elias produces a theoretical framework that more adequately addresses the explanatory dimension of orientation and that provides a more comprehensive understanding of some of the main themes the critical authors addressed in their studies of the history of the species. In this manner, Elias advances an explanatory grand narrative of the long-term process of human development which expresses a more cosmopolitan – in the sense of species-encompassing – perspective on the human condition, which is better able to detach from more particularistic time and society bound points of view, and which is thus more successful in guarding against the reproduction of the modernist shortcomings which affect

the grand narratives of the critical authors. Elias's approach thus show how grand narratives can be recovered in critical international theory in a way that improves its role as a means of orientation, enabling human beings to more adequately understand their conditions of existence and how these have developed throughout the species' history. This conclusion supported our argument regarding the indispensability of Elias's process sociology for the development of a more adequate answer to the problem of orientation.

However, we also noted that process sociology's commitment to detached sociological analysis, while providing very important insights on how a more adequate answer to the explanatory dimension of orientation might be developed, is never complemented by Elias's envisioned secondary re-involvement. Consequently, process sociology does not engage in any particular depth with the anticipatory dimension of orientation and with the question of what forms of political agency might enable human beings to expand their capacity for self-determination by acquiring a greater degree of conscious and collective control over their conditions of existence and future development. As such, the argument has been made that a more adequate answer to both dimensions of the problem of orientation requires a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory. In this context, some preliminary thoughts were advanced regarding how this synthesis can be achieved by identifying what forms of secondary re-involvement are implied in Elias's work, and how his materialist and emergentist approach to human development enables a recovery of Marx's non-transcendental answer to the anticipatory dimension of orientation.

In particular, we highlighted how Elias's work permits a non-transcendental assessment of the social conditions in which human beings might develop a greater degree of conscious control over the internal patterning of their personality structures on the basis of which they can attain a more detached and cosmopolitan perspective on their conditions of existence and ensure a better balance between the self-fulfilment of their drives and the self-restraints they need to observe in their relations with other people and with non-human nature given the global interdependence of the species. This analysis led us to argue that a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory would carry out, on the basis of its explanatory model of human development, an anticipatory assessment of how the human powers of self-determination can be expanded which orientates human political agency, on the one hand, to a historically-embedded critique of forms of political

activity and discourse which reinforce the double-bind in world politics and its associated parochial and ethnocentric world-views and, on the other hand, to the support for the constitution and further development of innovations at the level of international society such as global institutions that promote more cosmopolitan modes of attunement and mutual identification between people. In this context, we referred to the historical emergence of the human rights regime as one such global institution, whose further development might lead to a species-wide consensus regarding the patterns of self-restraint that human beings and their political communities need to observe in their mutual dealings. Together with proposals for ecological citizenship, the human rights regime points to the possibility for the historical emergence of more cosmopolitan modes of orientation that might contribute to untie the double-bind in world politics, reduce the tensions and dangers that people pose to each other and to non-human nature, and cultivate more detached world-views on the basis of which they might better attune to the reality of their global interconnection. These changes imply active political support for the development of collective learning process, through processes of deliberative consensualization at the level of international society, regarding how human beings might more consciously control their own capacity for control, and thus achieve a more adequate balance between the satisfaction of their drives and the forms of self-restraint they need to observe in order to collectively bring under greater control the unplanned processes that shape their conditions of existence at all three levels of human experience, i.e. people's internal human nature, their relations with external non-human nature, and the social networks of interdependent humanity.

However, we also argued that the still insufficient fund of knowledge about human development blocks the possibility of more positive answers about how the human networks of interdependence should to be organised without opening themselves up to the reproduction of modernist myths. As such, all engagements with the anticipatory dimension of orientation need to be highly tentative and always coupled with the further development of more detached analyses of the several paths of human development and their long-term global interweaving. This observation led us to conclude that a higher synthesis between process sociology and critical theory should be carried out by multi-disciplinary teams of social scientists which clearly divide amongst their members the pursuit of two interconnected objectives. First, the production of more detached and explanatory analyses

of different, society-specific, developmental processes and their intertwinement in longer and more complex global webs of human interdependence in the context of an international society which now encompasses the species as a whole. And second, given that international society is the main expression of the interweaving of human developmental processes and the main site of their deliberative consensualization of the patterns of self-restraint that should be observed between people, this higher synthesis must focus the anticipatory study of the immanent historical potential for the expansion of human self-determination on this level of analysis. This focus is fundamental in order to achieve a more adequate involvement–detachment capable of simultaneously avoiding a projection of more parochial points of view as universal, while maintaining a more involved normative commitment to forms of political agency that actualise the potential for the expansion of the human powers of control which has been gathered at each particular historical juncture.

Our inquiry into the problem of orientation has thus led us to argue that an effort must be made to produce more comprehensive grand narratives on human development which are capable of providing a more detached and cosmopolitan perspective on the history of the species and its contemporary conditions of existence, while recognising and protecting human diversity and thus guarding against the danger of becoming themselves new forms of myth. Furthermore, this study contributed to the future attainment of this goal through an exploration of both critical theory and process sociology's role in the production of theoretical frameworks that might better sustain the tension inherent in the problem of orientation in the current phase of human development. Finally, it provided a basic groundwork of how critical international theory can be further developed through a greater engagement with process sociology, which enables it to address more adequately the implications of human global interdependence and provide orientation to human beings in a manner that helps them better understand the conditions of existence of the global web of humankind and how they might come to make more of their history under conditions of their own choosing.

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